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The
GARDEN
WITHOUT
WALLS



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THE GARDEN WITHOUT WALLS

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To Her

WHOSE NAME I MAY NOT TELL



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BOOK I
THE WALLED-IN GARDEN

*And God planted a garden and drove
out man; and he placed at the east of
Eden angels and the flame of a sword.*

CHAPTER I

MY MOTHER

It happened about six in the morning, in a large red room. A bar of sunlight streamed in at the window, in which dust-motes were dancing by the thousand. A man and woman were lying in bed; I was standing up in my cot, plucking at the woman with my podgy fingers. She stirred, turned, rubbed her eyes, smiled, stretched out her arms, and drew me under the bed-clothes beside her. The man slept on.

This is my earliest recollection. If it be true that the soul is born not at the same time as the body, but at a later period with the first glimmering of memory, then this was the morning on which my soul groped its way into the world.

I have sometimes thought that I have never grown wiser than the knowledge contained in that first recollection. Nothing that I have to record in this book will carry me much further. The scene is symbolic: a little child, inarticulate, early awakened in a sunlit room, vainly striving to make life answer questions. Do we ever get beyond that? The woman is Nature. The man is God. The room is the world—for me it has always been filled with sunlight.

My mother I remember as very tall and patient, vaguely beautiful and smiling. I can recall hardly anything she said—only her atmosphere and the fragrance of violets which seemed always to cling about her. I know that she took me out beneath the stars one night; there was frost on the ground and church-bells were ringing. And I know that one summer's day, on a holiday at Ransby, she led me through lanes far out into the country till my legs were

very tired. We came to a large white house, standing in a parkland. There we hid behind a clump of trees for hours. A horseman came riding down the avenue. My mother ran out from behind the trees and tried to make him speak with her. She held me up to show me to him, and grasped his rein to make him halt. He said something angrily, set spurs to his horse, and disappeared at a gallop. She began to cry, telling me that the man was her father. I was too tired to pay much attention. She had to carry me most of the way home. It was dark when we entered Ransby.

In London some months later—it must have been winter-time, for we were sitting by the fire-light—she took me in her arms and asked me if I would like to have a sister. I refused stoutly. At dawn I was wakened by hurrying feet on the staircase. Next day I was given a new box of soldiers to keep me quiet. A lot of strange people stole in and out the house as if they owned it. I never saw my mother again.

All I had known of her had been so shy and gentle that it was a good deal of a surprise to me to learn years later that, as a girl, she had been considered rather dashing. She had been called "The gay Miss Fannie Evrard" and her marriage with my father had begun with an elopement. Her father was Sir Charles Evrard, brother-in-law to the Earl of Lovegrove; my father's folk were ship-chandlers in Ransby, outfitting vessels for the Baltic trade.

The inequality of the match, as far as social position was concerned, made life in Ransby impossible. My father was only a reporter on the local paper at the time of his escapade; the Evrards lived at Woadley Hall and were reckoned among the big people in the county. It must have been to this house that my mother took me on that dusty summer's day.

After his marriage my father settled down in London, gaining his living as a free-lance journalist. I believe he was very poor at the start. He did not re-visit Ransby until years later. Pride prevented. My mother returned

as often as finances would allow, in the vain hope of a reconciliation with her family. On these occasions she would stay at the ship-chandler's, and was an object of curiosity and commiseration among the neighbors.

Most of the facts which lie outside my own recollection were communicated to me by my grandmother. She never got over her amazement at her son's audacity. It was without parallel in her experience until I attempted to repeat his performance with an entirely individual variation. She never tired of rehearsing the details; it was noticeable that she always referred to my mother as "Miss Fannie."

"Often and often," she would say, "have I seen Miss Fannie come a-prancin' down the High Street with her groom a-followin'. She was always mounted on a gray horse, with a touch of red about her. Sometimes it was a red feather in her hat and sometimes a scarlet cloak. When Sir Charles rode beside her you could see the pride in his eye. She was his only child."

After my small sister failed to arrive someone must have told me that my mother had gone to find her. I would sit for hours at the window, watching for her home-coming.

CHAPTER II

THE MAGIC CARPET

I WAS born in South London on a crowded street lying off the Old Kent Road. It was here that my mother died. When I was about six, a false-dawn came in my father's prospects, on the promise of which he moved northward to the suburb of Stoke Newington.

At the time of which I write, Stoke Newington still retained a village atmosphere. The houses, for the most part, were old, bow-windowed, and quaint. Many of them were occupied by leisured people—retired city-merchants, maiden-ladies, and widows, who came there because it was reasonable in price without being shabby. It was a back-water of the surging stream of London life where one found time to grow flowers, read books, and be kindly. Its red, tree-shaded streets witnessed many an old-fashioned love-affair. The early morning was filled with country sounds—singing of birds, creaking of wooden-gates, and cock-crowing.

Our house was situated in Pope Lane, a blind alley overgrown with limes. It had posts set up at the entrance to prevent wheel-traffic. You could not see the houses from the lane, so steeply did the walls rise up on either side. It led nowhere and was a mere tunnel dotted with doors. Did the doors open by chance as you were passing, you caught glimpses of kitchen-gardens, shrubberies, and well-kept lawns. We rarely saw our neighbors. Each door hid a mystery, on which a child could exercise his fancy.

My father was too strenuously engaged in wringing an income out of reluctant editors to pay much attention to my upbringing. In moving to Pope Lane, he had made an increase in his expenditure which, as events proved, his

prospects did not warrant. The keeping up of appearances was a continuous and unrelenting fight. Early in the morning he was at his desk; the last thing in the evening, when I ventured into his study to bid him good-night, his pen was still toiling industriously across the page. His mornings were spent in hack-work, preparing special articles on contemporary economics for a group of daily papers. His evenings were given over to the writing of books which he hoped would bring him fame, many of which are still unpublished.

He coveted fame and despised it. He wrote to please himself and expected praise. He was an unpractical idealist, always planning huge undertakings for which there was no market. His most important work, which occupied twenty years of his life, was *The History of Human Progress*. It was really a history of human selfishness, written to prove that every act which has dug man out of the mire, however seemingly sacrificial and noble, had for its initial motive an enlightened self-interest. He never managed to get it before the public. It was disillusionizing. We all know that we are selfish, but we all hope that with luck we could be heroes.

The trouble with my father was that he was an emotionalist ashamed of his emotions. He wanted to be scrupulously just, and feared that his sentiments would weaken his judgments. Temperamentally he was willing to believe everything. But he had read Herbert Spencer and admired the academic mind; consequently he off-set his natural predisposition to faith by re-acting from everything accepted, and scrawled across the page of recorded altruism a gigantic note of interrogation. He gave to strangers and little boys the impression of being cynical and hard, whereas he had within him the smoldering enthusiasms and compassion which go to the kindling of martyrs and saints. He was planned for a man of action, but had turned aside to grope after phantoms in the mazes of the mind. His career is typical of the nineteenth century and sedentary modes of life.

Looking back I often wonder if he would not have been happier as a ship-chandler, moving among jolly sea-captains, following his father's trade. How many hours, mounting into years, he wasted on literary failures—hours which might have been spent on people and friendships. As a child I rarely saw him save at meal-times, and then he was pre-occupied. For some years after my mother's death he was afraid to love anyone too dearly.

He solved the problem of my immediate existence by locking the door into the lane, and giving me the freedom of the garden. I can recall it in every phase. Other and more recent memories have passed away, but, when I close my eyes and think back, I am there again. Moss-grown walks spread before me. Peaches on the wall ripen. I catch the fragrance of box, basking in sunshine. I see my father's study-window and the ivy blown across the pane. He is seated at his desk, writing, writing. His face is turned away. His head is supported on his hand as though weary. I am wondering why it is that grown people never play, and why it is that they shut smaller people up always within walls.

I saw nothing of the outside world except on Sundays. My father used to lead me as far as the parish church, and call for me when service was ended. He never came inside. His intellectual integrity forbade it. He was an agnostic. My mother, knowing this, had made him promise to take me. He kept his word exactly.

Few friends called on us. My companions were cooks and housemaids. I borrowed my impressions of life, as most children do, from the lower orders of society. A servant is a prisoner; so is a child. Both are subject to tyranny, and both are dependent for their happiness on omnipotent persons' moods and fortunes. A maidservant is always dreaming of a day when she will marry a lord, and drive up in a glittering carriage to patronize her old employer. A child, sensitive to misunderstanding, has similar visions of a far-off triumph which will consist in

heaping coals of fire. He will heap them kindly and for his parents' good, but unmistakably.

It was in Pope Lane that I first began to dream of a garden without walls. As I grew older I became curious, and fretted at the narrowness of my restraint. What happened over there in the great beyond? Rumors came to me; sometimes it was the roar of London to the southward; sometimes it was the sing-song of a mower traversing a neighbor's lawn. I dreamt of an unwall'd garden, through which a child might wander on forever—an Eden, where each step revealed a new beauty and a fresh surprise, where flowers grew always and there were no doors to lock.

It was a book which gave the first impulse to this thought; in a sense it was responsible for the entire trend of my character and life. In recent years I have tried to procure a copy. All traces of it seem to have vanished. If I ever knew the name of the author I have forgotten it. I am even uncertain of the exact title. I believe it was called *The Magic Carpet*.

Mine was a big red copy. The color came off when your hands got sticky. It had to be supported on the knees when read, or the arms got tired. It was a story of children, ordered about by day, who by night went forth invisible to wander the world, riding on the nursery carpet. Absurd! Yes, but this carpet happened to be magic. All you had to do was to seat yourself upon it, hold on tight, and wish where you wanted to be carried. In a trice you were beyond the reach of adults, flying over roofs and spires, post-haste to the land of your desire. In that book little boys ate as much as they liked and never had stomach-ache. They defeated whole armies of cannibals without a scratch. They rescued fair ladies, as old as housemaids, but ten times more beautiful, who wanted to marry them. No one seemed to know that they were little. No one condescended or told them to run away and wash their faces. Nobody went to school. Everybody was polite.

The pictures which illustrated the adventures still seem

in remembrance the finest in the world. They typify the spirit of romance, the soul of youth, the revolt against limitations. They appealed to the lawless element within me, which still yearns to straddle the stallion of the world and go plunging bare-back through space.

I tried every carpet in the house, but none of ours were magic. I lay awake long after I had been put to bed, imagining the lands I would visit if I had it. I would go to my mother first, and try to bring her back. I remembered vaguely how care-free my father had been when we had had her with us. Perhaps, if she returned, he would be happy. Then an inspiration came; there was one carpet which I had not tested—it lay before the fire-place in my father's study. But how should I get at it? Only in the hours of darkness was it different from any other carpet, and in the evenings my father was always there. I never doubted but that this was the carpet; its difficulty of access proved it.

One night I lay awake, pinching myself to stave off sleep. It was winter. Outside I could hear the trees cracking beneath the weight of snow upon their boughs. The servants came to bed. I saw them pass my door, casting long shadows, screening their candles with their hands lest the light should strike across my eyes and rouse me. I waited to hear the study-door open and close. In waiting I began to drowse. I came to myself with a shudder. What hour it was I could not guess. I got out of bed. Stealing to the top of the stairs I looked down; all was blackness. Listening, I could hear the heavy breathing of sleepers. Bare-footed, I crept down into the hall, clinging to the banisters. The air was bitter. I was frightened. Each step I took seemed to cause the house to groan and tremble. The door of the study stood open. By the light of the fire, dying in the grate, I could just make out the carpet. Darting across the threshold, I knelt upon it. "Take me to Mama," I whispered. The minutes ticked by; it did not stir. I spoke again; nothing happened.

I heard a sound in the doorway—a sudden catching of the breath. I turned. My father was standing, watching me. I did not scream or cry out. He came toward me through the darkness. What with fear of consequences and disappointment, I fell to sobbing.

I think he must have seen and overheard everything, for, with a tenderness which had something hungry and awful about it, he gathered me in his arms. Without a word of question or explanation, he carried me up to bed. Before he left, he halted as though he were trying to utter some thought which refused to get said. Suddenly he bent above the pillow, just as my mother used to do, and kissed me on the forehead. His cheeks were salty.

As my eyes closed, a strange thing happened. The snow lay on the ground and there were no flowers, but the room was filled with the fragrance of violets.

CHAPTER III

THE SPUFFLER

ONE day there was a ring at the door in the lane, followed by a loud and impatient rat-a-tat. A gentleman, who was a stranger to me, hurled himself across the threshold. He wore the frown of one who is intensely in earnest, whose mind is very much occupied. His mustaches were the fiercest and most eager that I ever saw on any man. They stuck out at right angles from under his nose like a pair of shaving-brushes. They were of an extraordinary purplish color, and would have done credit to a pirate. But his dress was more clerical than sea-faring. It consisted of a black frock coat, bound with braid at the edges where the cloth was fretted; his vest was low-cut to display an ocean of white shirt, above which a small tie of black silk wobbled. Hurrying up the path, tugging at his bushy eye-brows, he disappeared into the house. The last I saw of him was a red bandana handkerchief, streaming like a danger-signal from his coat-tail pocket. I thought he must be one of those hostile publishers my father talked about or, at the very least, an editor.

Hetty, the maid, came into the garden looking worried. She did not stand on the steps and yell, as was customary, as though daring me to disobey her. She caught up her skirts with a dignified air and spoke my name softly, employing the honeyed tones with which she enticed our milkman every morning. I perceived at once that something momentous had occurred, and came out from behind the bushes. Then I saw the reason for her sudden change of manners—the purple mustached stranger was watching us from behind the curtains of my father's study-window. I was most agreeably and unpresentably grubby. Hetty

was distressed at my appearance; I knew she was by the way she kept hurting my hand and muttering to me to hide behind her.

When we got inside the house she became voluble, but only in whispers.

"Now, Master Dante, I can't 'elp it if the soap do get into your mouth. You've got to be a clean boy fer once in yer h'existence. It may mean h'everythin'. That gent's some relation o' yourn. 'E's goin' to take you away wiv him, an' he may 'ave money. I shall 'ate to lose yer. Now let's look at yer neck."

She scrubbed away at my face till it was scarlet; she let the water from the flannel trickle down my back. I was too awe-inspired to wriggle; by some occult power the dreadful personage downstairs might learn about it. Having been pitched into my Sunday sailor-suit and squeezed into a pair of new boots and prickly stockings, I was bundled into the august presence.

When I entered he was straddling the fire-place carpet—the one which ought to have been magic—and wagglng his coat-tails with his hands.

My father rose from his chair. "This is your great-uncle, Obadiah Spreckles. Come and be introduced, Dante."

Up to now I had never heard of such a relative, but I came timidly forward and shook hands.

"A fine little fellow. A very fine little fellow, and the image of his mother," said my great-uncle.

My father winced at the mention of my mother. My great-uncle spread his legs still wider and addressed me in a jerky important manner.

"Got a lot of dogs and cats. Got a goat and a cow. Got some hens. Got up early this morning. Saw the sun shining. Thought you might like to take a look at 'em, young man."

Turning to my father, "Well, Cardover, I must be going. I'll take good care of him and all that. I'm very busy—hardly a moment to spare."

Before I knew what had happened, I had said good-bye to my father and was standing in the lane alone with my strange uncle.

When the door had banged and he knew that no grown-up could see him, he changed his manner. His hurry left him. Placing his hands on my shoulders, he looked down into my face, laughing. "Now for a good time, old chap."

At the end of the lane, where the posts blocked the passage, stood a little dog-cart and pony. My bag was stowed under the seat; at a click of the tongue from my uncle, the little beast started up like the wind.

It was a bright June morning. The sky was intensely blue and cloudless. The air was full of flower-fragrance and dreamy somnolence. I had seen so little of the world that everything was vivid to me, and touched with the vagrant poetry of romance. Tram-lines were streaks of silver down the streets, shops were palaces, cabbies gentlemen who plied their trade because they loved horses. Postmen going their rounds were philanthropists. Everyone was free, doing what he liked, and happy. In my child's way I realized that neither my father nor myself was typical—not all little boys were locked in gardens and not all grown men slaved from morning to midnight. A great lump came into my throat. It would have been quite easy to cry, I was so glad.

Uncle Obadiah kept chatting away, telling me that the name of his little mare was Dollie and how he came to buy her. "Couldn't afford it, you know, old chap. She costs me ten shillings a week for fodder. But when I saw that coster whacking her, and she looked up into my eyes when I went to stop him, I just couldn't resist her. She seemed to be asking me to buy her, and I did. You should have heard what your Aunt Lavinia said."

All the way along the streets he kept pointing with his whip to things that he thought were interesting. He engaged me in conversation—a thing which no one had thought worth doing. He asked me questions which were not senseless, and seemed to suppose that a child had

reasoning powers. I was flattered, and began to surprise myself by the boldness of the things I said.

We rattled down the City Road, past the Mansion House, over London Bridge to the Elephant and Castle, and so out toward Dulwich till we came within sight of the Crystal Palace.

He began to slow down and grow pensive, as though working out a problem. "You see, she'll have lunch ready. She's expecting us. She's very precise about the keeping of hours and won't like it." Then, "Hang it all. We may as well have a holiday now we're out."

Shaking loose the reins we started forward again, racing everything we met upon the road. My uncle's high spirits returned. I don't know where we went. I know there were woods and farm-houses. We stopped for lunch at a village-inn. It stood on the edge of a gorse-common. On the common a donkey was grazing. A flock of geese wandered across it. Boys were playing cricket against a tree-stump. Several great wagons, piled high with vegetables, were drawn up, the horses with their heads deep in nose-bags.

We had our meal in the tap-room with the wagoners. While they were present my uncle assumed his pontifical manner, addressing me as "young man" and them as "my good fellows." He was very dignified, and benevolent, and haughty. They were much impressed. But when they had left and we were alone, he winked his eye at me solemnly, as much as to say "that was all pretense. Now let's be natural," and entered once more into my boy's world of escapades and gilded shadows.

While the mare rested, we strolled round. In a hollow of the woods we came across a gipsy encampment. Three yellow caravans were drawn up together. A fire was burning in the open, over which an iron pot was suspended from a bough. A fierce, gaudily clad woman was bent above it stirring. She looked up at sound of our approach and the big ear-rings which dropped upon her neck jangled. Recognizing my uncle she nodded, and allowed us to sit down

and watch her. Presently a rough man came out of the woods and threw himself down beside us. A young woman returned from fortune-telling, with her baby in a shawl across her shoulders. Bowls were brought out, and we had a second lunch from the great pot bubbling on the fire. Pipes were produced; the women smoked as well as the men. My uncle asked them where they had been and how they had fared since last he saw them. I listened intently to their answers; it seemed that they must have discovered the boundless garden of which I had only dreamt.

In the dog-cart on the homeward journey, I learnt that my uncle was acquainted with a number of queer people. "Everybody's interesting, Dante," he said, by way of excuse and explanation; "it's never safe to despise anyone."

In course of conversation he informed me that he had always longed to be a gipsy, but had never dared. When I asked why not, he answered shortly, "Your Aunt Lavinia—she's not like us and wouldn't understand."

"But if there wasn't any Aunt Lavinia—would you dare then?"

"I might have to," he said, smiling grimly.

I didn't know at all what he meant. He didn't intend I should. After all these years those words, chance-spoken to a child, remain with me. They were as near to a confession that his wife supported him as was possible for a proud man.

My grandmother Cardover at Ransby, whose sister he had married, had a habit of nicknaming people with words of her own invention. She called my great-uncle The Spuffler. Whether the verb *to Spuffle* is Suffolk dialect or a word of her own coining, I have never been able to find out—but in its hostile sense it described him exactly.

A spuffler is a gay pretender, who hides his lack of success beneath the importance of his manners. Time is his one possession, and to him it is valueless; yet he tries to impress the world with its extreme rarity. A spuffler is always in a hurry; he talks loudly. He plays a game of

make-believe that he is a person of far-reaching authority; he deceives others and almost deceives himself. He is usually small in stature and not infrequently bald-headed. In conversing he makes an imaginary lather with his hands and points his finger at you. He may splutter and spit when he gets excited; but this is accidental and not necessary. The prime requisite is that he should affect the prosperity of a bank-president and be dependent on some quite obscure source for his pocket-money. Since I have lived in America I have become familiar with a word which is very similar—a *bluffer*. But a bluffer is a conscious liar and may be a humorist, whereas a spuffler does all in his power to deceive himself and is always in dead earnest.

It is a curious fact that the men whom I loved best as a child were all three incompetents in the worldly sense. They were clever, but they lacked the faculty of marketing their talents. They were boys in men's bodies. With children they had the hearts of children and were delightful. With business men their light-heartedness counted as irresponsibility and was a drawback. In two out of the three cases named, the disappointments which resulted from continual defeat produced vices. Only my Uncle Obadiah, clad in his armor of unpierceable spuffle, rode through the ranks of life scatheless, with his sweetness unembittered and his integrity untarnished. But they were all good men.

Through the June twilight we returned to the outskirts of London. We turned in at a ruined gateway, and rode through a tunnel of overhanging trees where laburnum blazed through the dusk. A long rambling house grew up before us. At one time it must have been the country estate of some city-merchant. At sound of our wheels on the gravel, the front-door opened and a little lady stepped out to greet us. She was neat and speckless as a hospital nurse. Her body was slim and dainty as a girl's. There was an air of decision and restraint about her, which was in direct opposition to my uncle's hurried geniality.

When we had halted, she lifted me out of the dog-cart and carried me into the house to a large room at the back, which looked into a shadowy garden and a paddock beyond. It seemed older and more opulent than any house I had known as yet. There was so much space about it.

My uncle came in from stabling Dollie. "Well, Lavinia, I couldn't get home to lunch. Very sorry, but it couldn't be helped."

He darted a look across at me, wondering how much I had told her. The secret was established; I knew that I must hold my tongue. I knew something else—that he was afraid of her. Throughout the meal he kept up a stream of strenuous pretense, discussing large plans aloud with himself. What they were I cannot now remember. I suppose my grandmother would have called them shuffle. Suddenly he rose from the table, saying that he had a lot of letters to answer and excused himself. But when I went into his room an hour later to bid him good-night, he was sitting before his desk, doing nothing in particular, biting the end of his pen.

When my aunt and I were left together I felt very lonely at first. She had sat so silent all through supper.

But when the door had closed, she turned to me laughing. I knew at once that, like most grown-ups when they are together, she had only been shamming. Now she was going to be real.

"Did you have a good day in the country?" she asked. "Oh, he can't deceive me; I could tell by the dust on the wheels."

Then, realizing, I suppose, that it was not fair to pump me, she stopped asking questions and began to speak about myself. She drew up a chair to the window and sat with me in the dark with her arms about me. She seemed extraordinarily young, and when her silky gray hair touched my cheek as she bent above me, I wondered what had made my uncle say that she wasn't like us and wouldn't understand.

They each had their secret world of desire: his was the

open road, where liberty was and lack of convention; hers was a home with fire-light and children. She was childless. Into both these worlds a little boy might enter. That night as I lay awake in bed I was puzzled. Why was it that grown people were so funny, and could never be real with one another?

CHAPTER IV

RUTHITA

It was my Uncle Obadiah who first opened my eyes to the mysteries of the animal world. In so doing he flung wide a door into happiness which many a wiser man has neglected. He derived nearly all his pleasures from the cheerful little things of life. A curious sympathy existed between him and the lower creation. All the cats and dogs in the district were his friends. He attributed to them almost human personalities, and gave them special names of his own choosing. It was a wonderful day for me when he first made me realize that all-surrounding was a kingdom of beasts and birds of which I, who had always been ruled, might be ruler.

In the paddock which lay between the garden and orchard, he had his own especial kingdom. His subjects were a cow, a goat, some very domestically inclined rabbits, about a hundred hens, and innumerable London sparrows. The latter he had trained to fly down from the trees and settle on his shoulders when he whistled.

Early in the morning we would go there together; the first duty of the day was to feed the menagerie. How distinctly I can recall those scenes—the dewy lawn, dappled golden by sunlight falling through leaves, the droning of bees setting forth from hives on their day's excursion, the smoke slowly rising in the summer stillness from distant chimney-pots, and my uncle's voice making excited guesses at how many eggs we should gather.

Eggs represented almost his sole contribution to the family income. Among his many Eldorados was the persistent belief that he could make his fortune at poultry-raising. He would talk to me about it for hours as we

worked in the garden, like a man inspired, making lightning calculations of the sums he would one day realize. He was continually experimenting and crossing breeds with a view to producing a more prolific strain of layers. He had a dream that one day he would produce the finest strain of fowl in the world. He would call it *The Spreckles*—his name would be immortalized. He would be justified in the eyes of Aunt Lavinia; and success would justify him in the eyes of all men.

Meanwhile my aunt declared that Obad spent more time and thought on that blest live-stock than he would ever see back in money. "Obad" was her contraction for his name; when she spoke to him sharply it sounded like her opinion of his character. But, in her own way, she was fond of him. Perhaps she had come to love his very failings as we do the faults of our friends. She was secretly proud of her own capacity; her thwarted mother-instinct found an outlet in the sense of his dependence. Nevertheless, the great fundamental cleavage lay between them: she lived in an anxious world where tradesmen's bills required punctual payment; his world was a careless playground in which no defeat was ever final. She was stable in her moods, self-reliant and tenaciously courageous. He was forever changing: with adults he was like a house in mourning, shuttered, austere, grave; but should a youngster pass by, the blinds were jerked aside and a laughing face peered out.

His most important make-believe was that he was a benefactor of humanity. He held honorary positions of secretary to various philanthropic societies—*The Society for the Housing of Gipsies*, *The Society for the Assisting of Decrepit Ladies*, etc. The positions were honorary because he could find no one willing to pay him. He worked for nothing because he was ashamed of being forever out of employment. He got great credit for his services among charitable people; the annual votes of thanks which he received helped to bolster up his self-respect throughout the year.

As I grew older and more observant, I used to wonder what had induced my aunt to marry him. Again it was my Grandmother Cardover who told me, "He spuffed Lavinia into it, my dear." It seems that he caught her by the vast commercial and humanitarian possibilities of one of his many plans. When she awoke to the fact that her husband was not a man, but the incarnation of perpetual boyhood, she may have been disappointed, but she did not show it. Like a sensible woman, instead of crying her eyes out, she set about earning a livelihood. Uncle Obad had one marketable asset—his religion and the friends he gained by it. She took a decayed mansion in Charity Grove and established a Christian Boarding House. All her lodgers were young men, and by that proud subterfuge of poverty they were known as paying-guests.

The only Christian feature that I can remember about her establishment was that my uncle said grace before all meals at which the lodgers were present. At the midday meal, from which they were absent, it was omitted. The Christian Boarding House idea caught on with provincial parents whose sons were moving up to the city for the first time; it seemed to guarantee home morals. The sons soon perceived how matters stood and buried their agnostic prejudices beneath good feeding.

A general atmosphere of obligation was created by my aunt in her husband's favor; she always spoke as though it was very kind of so public a man as Mr. Spreckles to squander his scanty privacy by letting paying-guests share his roof. She made such a gallant show with what she earned that everyone thought her husband had a private fortune, which enabled him to live in such style and give so much time to charitable works. She would hint as much in conversing with her friends, and invariably feigned the greatest pride and contentment in his activities. Thanks to his spuffling and her courage, there were not five people outside the family who ever guessed the true circumstances.

But when all is said, the real business of my Uncle Obad's life was not philanthropy or running a boarding-

house, but poultry-raising. It was he who gave me the old white hen, without which I might never have met Ruthita. My money-making instincts were roused by his talk of the profits to be derived from eggs. I was enthusiastic to follow in his footsteps. To this end, at the hour of parting, when I was returning to Pope Lane, he gave me an ancient white Leghorn. He did not tell me she was ancient; he recommended her to me as belonging to a strain that could never get broody.

On the long drive home across London, my grief at leaving Charity Grove was partly mitigated by my new possession. It was a tremendous experience to feel that I had it in my power to make a live thing, even though it were but a hen, sad or happy. I discussed with Uncle Obad all the care that was necessary for egg-production. I got him to work out sums for me. If my hen were to lay an egg every other day throughout the year, how much money would I make by selling each egg to my father at a penny? I felt that the foundations of my financial fortunes were secure. The genuineness of my expectations made my uncle restless and ashamed; he knew that the hen had passed her first youth, and suggested that pepper in her food might help matters.

It was supper-time when I arrived home. I let the hen loose on the lawn to stretch her legs. My father was busy as usual, but he delayed a little longer over the meal in honor of my home-coming.

Some of the things I blurted out about my uncle must have revealed to him the comradeship that lay between us. He had risen from the table, but he sat down again. "You have known your uncle just a fortnight," he said, "and yet you seem to have told him more about yourself than you have told me in all these years. Why is it, Dante? You're not afraid of me? It can't be that." We were both of us shy. He reached over and took my hand, repeating, "It can't be that."

He knew that it was that and so did I. Yet he was hungry for my affection. He was making an unaccustomed

effort to win my confidence and draw me out. But he spoke to me as though I was a grown man, whereas my uncle to get near me had become himself a child. If he had only talked to me about my white hen, I should have chattered. But I was awed by his embarrassment, and remained silent and unresponsive.

He went on to tell me that all the time he was away from me in his study he was working for my sake. "I want to have the money to give you a good start in life. I never had it. You must succeed where I have failed."

I understood very little of what he was saying except that money and success seemed to be the same. That was the way Uncle Obad had talked about poultry-raising. I had no idea where money came from or how it was obtained. I must have asked him some question about it, for I recall one of the phrases he used in replying, "A man succeeds not by what he does, but by the things at which he has aimed."

The red sun fell behind the trees while we talked, peered above my father's shoulder, and sank out of sight. It was dusk when I ran into the garden.

I felt prisoned again—the door into the lane was locked and the walls were all about me. The lamp in my father's study was kindled and flung a bar of light across the shrubbery. He was working to get the money that I might be allowed to work. I didn't like the idea. I didn't want to work. Why couldn't one drive always through the sunshine, pulling up at taverns and sitting beside gipsy camp-fires?

I commenced to search for the white hen and so forgot these economic complications. Here and there I came across places where she had been scrabbing, but I could see her nowhere. At last I discovered her roosting on the branch of an apple-tree which grew close by the wall at the end of the garden. I spoke to her kindly, but she refused to come down. She was too high up for me to reach her from the ground. When I scattered grain, she blinked at me knowingly, as much as to say, "Surely you don't

think I'm as big a fool as that." It seemed to me that she was grieving for all the cocks and hens to whom she had said farewell. She was embittered against me because she was solitary. I explained to her that, if she'd lay eggs, I'd buy her a husband. She remained skeptical of my good intentions. There was nothing for it but to climb. I could hear the leaves shaking and the apples bumping on the ground; my hand was stretched out to catch her when, with a hoarse scream of defiance, she flapped her wings and disappeared into the great nothingness over our neighbor's wall.

Unless the white hen had blazed the trail, I might have remained in the walled-in garden for years without ever daring to discover a way out. I was too excited at this crisis to measure my temerity. In my fear of losing her I did a thing undreamt of and unplanned—I swung myself from the branch on to the top of the brickwork and dropped on the other side. A bed of currant bushes broke my fall. I got upon my feet scratched and dazed.

The first thing I saw was a long stretch of grass bordered by flowers. At the end of it was a small two-storied house, gabled and with verandas running round it. In one of the upper-story windows a light was burning; all the rest was in darkness. In the middle of the lawn I could see my white hen strutting in a very stately manner. I stole up behind her, but she began clucking. In my fear of discovery, I lost all patience and commenced to chase her vigorously. I ran her at last into a bed of peas, where she became entangled. I had her in my arms when I heard a voice, "Who are you?"

Turning suddenly, I found that a little girl was standing close behind me.

"My name's Dante."

"And mine's Ruthita."

We stared at one another through the dusk. I had never spoken to a little girl and for some reason, difficult to explain, commenced to tremble. It was not fear that caused it, but something strong and emotional.

"Dante," she whispered. "How pretty!" Then, "Where do you live?"

I jerked my thumb in the direction of the wall.

"You climbed over?"

I nodded. She laughed softly. "Could you do it again? Oh, do come often, often. I'm so lonely, and we could play together."

Just then the voice of Hetty began to call in the distance, "Dan-tee, Dan-tee, where are you? Come to bed *di-rectly*."

Her voice drew nearer. She was searching for me, and passed quite close to us on the other side of the wall. We could hear the indignant rustle of her skirt and her heavy breathing with bending down so low to peer under bushes.

Ruthita came near to me so that I had my first glimpse of her eyes in the dark—eyes which were always to haunt me. Her hands were clasped against her throat in eagerness—she seemed to be standing tiptoe. "Don't tell," she pleaded. "It's our secret. But come again to-morrow."

I promised.

She watched me scrambling for a foot-hold in the wall. When I sat astride it, just before I vanished, she waved her hand.

The white hen had lost her importance in my thoughts; I bundled her into the tool-house, and then surrendered to Hetty. Hetty was very cross. She wanted to discover where I had been hiding, but I wouldn't tell her. When she left me, I crept out of bed and knelt beside the window for a long time gazing down into the blackness.

Far away a bird was calling. The tall trees waved their arms. The moon leapt out of clouds, and the branches reached up to touch her with their fingers. A little beam of light struggled free and ran about the garden. I tried to tell myself it was Ruthita.

The garden seemed less of a prison now—rather a place of magic and enchantment.

CHAPTER V

MARRIAGE ACCORDING TO HETTY

NEXT morning I was up early. Spiders' webs were still crystal with dew in the garden; they had not yet been tattered by the sun lifting up the flowers' heads. I had no hope that I would see Ruthita, but I wanted to peep across the wall while everyone was in bed and there was no one to observe me.

I had covered half the distance to the apple-tree, when I heard a sound of voices. They came from behind the tool-house. I fisted my hands and listened. A man and woman were conversing, but in such low tones that I could hear nothing that was said. I made sure they were thieves who had heard about my hen, and had come to rob me. I looked back at the windows of our house. All the blinds were lowered; everyone was sleeping. There was no sign of life anywhere, save the hopping of early risen black-birds between bushes in search of early risen worms. With a quickly beating heart I crouched beside the wall, advancing under cover of a row of sunflowers. Looking out from between their stalks, I discovered a man sitting on a wheelbarrow; a woman was balanced on his knee with her arm about his neck. The woman was Hetty and the man was our gardener.

Hetty was wearing her starched print-dress, ready to begin her morning's work. She wasn't a bit scornful or solemn, but was laughing and wriggling and tossing her head. She seemed quite a different person from the stern, moral housemaid, God's intimate friend, who told me everything that God had thought about me through the day when at night she was putting me to bed. Up to that moment it

had never occurred to me that she was pretty, but now her cheeks were flushed and the sun was in her rumpled hair. While I watched, our gardener drew her close and kissed her. She squeaked like a little mouse, and pretended to struggle to free herself.

I never dreamt that grown people ever behaved like that. I hadn't the faintest notion what she was doing or why she was doing it; but I knew that it was something secret, and silly, and beautiful. I also had the feeling that it was something pleasant and wrong, just like the things I most enjoyed doing, for which I was punished. I wanted to withdraw and tried to; but tripped over the sunflowers and fell.

Hetty and the gardener sprang apart. I knew what was going to happen next; I had caught them being natural—they were going to commence shamming. The gardener became very busy, piling his tools into the barrow. Hetty, talking in her cold and distant manner, said to him, "And don't forget the lettuce for breakfast, John. Master's very partic'lar about it."

I came from my hiding, thrusting my hands deep in my pockets, as though I kept my courage there and was frightened of its dropping out. The gardener's back was towards me, but he caught sight of me from between his legs. He just stopped like that with his face growing redder, his mouth wide-open, and stared. Hetty didn't look as pretty as she had been looking, but before she could say anything I said, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. I came to see my fowl—but I won't tell."

"Bless 'is little 'eart," cried John; "I thought it were 'is Pa, I wuz that scared."

Hetty knelt down beside me and rocked me to and fro half-hysterically, making me promise again and again that I would never tell.

"Was you doin' somethin' wrong?" I asked. "What was you doin'?"

They looked foolishly at one another.

All that day they kept me near them on one pretext

or another, afraid to let me get away from them. I had never known them so sensible and obliging; they did all kinds of things for me that they had never done before. After breakfast, while Hetty was dusting, John built me a little fowl-run. In the afternoon, while he was cutting the grass, Hetty sat with me beneath the apple-tree and told me what life meant. She spoke in whispers like a conspirator, and all the time that she was talking, I could hear Ruthita humming just the other side of the wall.

As I understood it, this was what she told me. When you first get here, *here* being the world, you own nothing and know nothing. Then, as you grow up, you know something but still own nothing. That's why you're ordered about and told not to do all the things that you want most to do. You can only please yourself when nobody's looking and must obey nearly everyone until you get money. There are several ways of getting it, and the pleasantest is sweet-hearting.

Here I interrupted her to inquire what was sweet-hearting. "Well," she said, turning her face away and looking dreamily at John, who was pushing the mower across the lawn, "sweet-heartin's what you saw me and John doin'."

"Does it always have to be done before breakfast?"

She threw back her head and laughed, swaying backwards and forwards. Then she became solemn and answered, "I 'ave to do it before breakfast 'cause I'm a servant. But I does it of evenin's on my night out."

She went on to tell me that sweet-hearting was the first step towards freedom and money. The second step was a honeymoon, which consisted in going away with a person of the other sex for a week to some place where you weren't known. When you came back to the people who knew you, they said you were married. So marriage was the third and last step. After that you were given a house, and money, and all the things for which you had always yearned. You had other people, who were like you were before you went sweet-hearting, to take your orders, and run your errands, and say "Sir" or "Madam." Sometimes

when you came back from your honeymoon, you found children in the house.

So through that long summer's afternoon beneath the apple-tree, with the leaves gently stirring and the sound of Ruthita humming across the wall, I gained my first lesson in sexology and domestic economics. It solved a good many problems by which I had been puzzled. For instance, why Uncle Obad had a pony and I hadn't; why I was sent to bed always at the same hour and my father went only when he chose; why big people could lose their tempers without being wicked, whereas God was always angry when I did it. There was only one thing that I couldn't understand: why two boys couldn't go on a honeymoon together, or two girls, and have the same results follow. Except for this, the riddle of society was now solved as far as I was concerned. Marriage seemed a thousand times more wonderful than the magic carpet.

I was tremendously interested in the possibilities of sweet-hearting and promised to help Hetty all I could. In return she declared that, when she was married, she would persuade my father to let her take me out of the garden.

That evening I crept over the wall and found Ruthita waiting. She was a slim dainty little figure, clad in a short white dress. She had great gray eyes, and long black hair and lashes. Her voice was soft and caressing, like the twittering of a bird in the ivy when one wakens on a summer morning. I told her in hurried whispers what I had discovered. It was all news to her. She slipped her hand into mine while I spoke and nestled closer.

"Little boy," she whispered when I had ended, "you *are* funny! You come climbing over the garden-wall and you tell me everything."

An old man came out of the house and began to pace up and down the walks. His head was bent forward on his chest and he had a big red scar on his forehead. A cloak hung loosely from his shoulders. He carried a stick in his hand on which he leant heavily. Ruthita said he was

her grandfather. Soon he began to call for her, and she had to go to him.

Little by little I learnt her story. Her grandfather was a French general. He had fought in the Franco-Prussian War until the Fall of the Empire and Proclamation of the Republic. Shortly after the flight of the Empress Eugénie he had come to England in disgust. His son, Ruthita's father, had stayed behind and been cut to pieces in the Siege of Paris. Ruthita's mother was an Englishwoman. She had never recovered from the shock of her husband's death. It was her light that I saw burning in the bedroom window of evenings. They were almost poor now and lived in great seclusion. The grandfather had dropped his rank and was known as plain Monsieur Favart. So Ruthita was even a closer prisoner than myself.

What did we talk about in those first stolen hours of childish friendship? I asked her once when we were grown up, but she could not tell me. Perhaps we did not say much. We felt together—felt the mystery of the enchanted unseen world. Why, the pigeons strutting on the housetops had seen more than we had; and they were not half as old as we were! They spread their wings, soared up into the clouds, and vanished. We told one another stories of where they went; but long before the stories were ended Monsieur Favart would come searching for Ruthita or the voice of Hetty would ring through the dusk, calling me to bed. Then I would lie awake and imagine myself a pigeon, and finish the story to myself.

The great beauty of our meetings was that they were undiscovered. It was always I who went to Ruthita—she was nothing of a climber, and the red bricks and green moss would have left tell-tale marks upon her dress. We had a nest of straw behind the currant bushes. Here, with backs against the hard wall and fingers digging in the cool damp earth, we would sit and wonder, talking in whispers, of all the mysteries that lay before us. Ruthita had vague memories of Paris, of soldiers marching and the beating of drums. Sometimes she would sing French songs to

me, of which she would translate the meaning between each verse. My contribution to our little store of knowledge was limited to what I have written in these few chapters.

I don't know at what stage in the proceedings our great idea occurred. It must have been in the early autumn, for the evenings were drawing in and often it was chilly. I had been talking about Hetty, when suddenly I exclaimed, "Why can't we do that?"

"Do what?" she questioned.

"Get married!"

Then I reminded her of the extreme simplicity of marriage as explained by our housemaid. All we had to do was to slip out of the garden for a few days, and then come back. We should find a house ready for us. Perhaps I should have a pony like Uncle Obad, and, instead of dolls, Ruthita would have real babies. It was the real babies that caught her fancy. Because of her mother, she needed a little persuading. "What will she do wivout me?"

"And what would she do if you'd never been borned?" I said.

Ruthita had five shillings in her money-box. I had only a shilling; for the white hen, in spite of pepper, had failed to lay any eggs. Six shillings seemed to us a fortune—ample to provide for the honeymoon of two small children.

The gate from Monsieur Favart's garden was never locked: that was evidently our easiest way out.

CHAPTER VI

THE YONDER LAND

WHAT did we hope to find that autumn morning when we slipped through that narrow door, forsaking the walls? It was all a guess to us—what lay beyond; but we knew that it must be something splendid. Of one thing we were quite certain: that at the end of a few days we should have grown tall; we should return to Pope Lane a man and woman. The little house would be there waiting, magically built in our hours of absence. Perhaps work had been begun already upon the babies that Ruthita wanted.

For the first time I had kissed her that morning, awkwardly and shyly, feeling that somehow it was proper. At any rate, Hetty and our gardener always kissed when they got the chance and no one was looking.

Monsieur Favart's door swung to behind us. We ran as quickly as our legs would carry us. The fear of pursuit was upon us. Pinned to the pillow of each of our empty beds was a sheet of paper on which was scrawled, "*Gon to git Married.*"

When at last we halted for breath, we seemed to have covered many miles of our journey. We were standing in a long, quaint street. On one side flowed a river, railed in so we couldn't get near it. On the other side stood an irregular row of substantial houses, for the most part creeper-covered. No faces appeared in the houses' windows. No one passed up or down the street. It was as yet too early. It seemed that the world was empty, and that we and the birds were its only tenants. We turned to the right, half-walking, half-running. I held Ruthita's hand tightly; the feel of it gave me courage.

We must have made a queer pair in the mellow autumn sunlight. Ruthita wore a white dress with a red cloak flung over it. On her head was a yellow straw poke-bonnet, which made her face look strangely small. She had on black shoes, fastened by a single strap, and black and white socks which, when she ran, kept dropping.

We had no idea of direction, but just hurried on with a vague idea that we must keep moving forward.

Presently we came across a drover, driving a flock of bewildered, tired sheep. He was a lame man. He had an inflamed red face and one of his eyes was out. When he wanted to make his flock move faster, he jabbed viciously at their tails with a pointed stick and started hopping from side to side, barking like a dog. He passed right by us, saying nothing, waving a red flag in his left hand with which he would sometimes mop his forehead. We followed. We followed him through streets of shops all shuttered; we followed him up a broad-paved hill; we followed him down a winding lane to a bridge across a river, beyond which lay marshes. Then he turned and called to us.

"Little master, where be you goin' and why be you followin'?"

To the country, I told him, to find the forest. I wanted to show Ruthita the unwall'd garden through which my uncle had led me.

The man screwed up his one eye, and gazed upon us shrewdly. "You be wery small to be goin' to the forest. But so be you're travellin' along my route you might as well 'elp an old feller."

We made our bargain with him. We would help him with his sheep, if he would guide us to the forest. We ran beside him across the short, crisp grass, imitating his cries to prevent the sheep from scattering. He told us that he had driven them from Epping up to London, but that times were cruel bad and the farmer who employed him had been unable to sell them. "It's cruel 'ard on a man o' my years," he kept saying, "cruel 'ard."

When I asked him what was cruel hard, he shook his head as though language failed to express his wrongs: "The world in gineral."

There was one of the sheep whose leg was broken. It kept lagging behind the rest, which made the man jab at it furiously. Ruthita's eyes filled with tears of indignation when she saw it. She stamped her little foot and insisted that he should not do it. The man pushed back his battered hat and scratched his forehead, staring at her. He seemed embarrassed and tried to excuse himself. "Humans is humans, miss, and sheep is sheep. It makes an old chap, made in Gawd's h'image, kind o' bitter to 'ave to spend his days a-scampering after a crowd o' silly quadrupeds. But if yer don't like it, I won't do it."

The river wound round about us. Sometimes it would leave us, but always it came flowing after us, in great circles as though lonely and eager for our company. On its banks stood occasional taverns, gaily painted, with wooden tables set before them. The grass about them was trodden bare, showing that they were often populous; but now they were deserted. Big barges lay sleepily at anchor, basking in the sun.

The drover commenced speaking again. "I'm an old soldier, I am. I lost me eye and got lamed in the wars; and now they makes game o' my h'infirmities and calls me——"

The name they called him was evidently too dreadful. He sighed heavily.

"Poor man," said Ruthita, slipping her hand into his horny palm. "What do they call you?"

"Old-Dot-and-Carry-One, 'cause o' the way I walks. It's woundin'. It 'urts me feelin's, after the way I've served me country."

We seated ourselves by the muddy river-bank, while the sheep grazed and rested. Far in the distance trees broke the level of the sky-line, so I knew that we were going in the right direction and our guide was to be trusted. Dot-and-Carry-One produced a loaf of bread from his

pocket and, dividing it into three pieces, shared it with us.

Little by little he gave us his confidence, telling us of the world as he knew it. "It's a place o' wimen and war. To the h'eye wot's prejoodiced there's nothin' else in it. But your h'eye ain't prejoodiced, and don't yer never let it git so, young miss and master. I've seen lots. I wuz in the Crimea and I wuz in h'India, but I never yet seen the country where a man can't be 'appy if he wants. There's music, an' there's nature, an' there's marriage. Now music for h'instance."

He produced from his ragged coat a penny whistle and trilled out a tune upon it. While he played he looked as merry a fellow as one could hope to meet in a day's march. The sheep stopped cropping to gaze at us. We clapped our hands and asked him to go on.

He shook his head and replaced his pipe. "Then there's nature. Just now I wuz complainin'. But supposin' I do drive sheep back and forth, how many men wuz up in Lun'non to see the sunrise this mornin'? I never miss it, 'ceptin' when I'm drunk. I knows the seasons o' the bloomin' flowers, Gawd bless 'em, and can h'imitate the birds' songs and call 'em to me. That's somethin'. An' if I don't sleep in a stuffy bed, which would be better for me rheumatics, I can count the stars and have the grass for coverin'. And then there's marriage——"

He paused. His eye became moist and his face gentle. "I 'ad a little nipper and a girl once."

That was all. We wanted to ask him questions about marriage, but he pulled his hat down over his eyes and lay back, refusing to answer.

Ruthita and I guarded the sheep and kept them from straying, while he slept. We made chains out of flowers, and, taking off our shoes and socks, paddled in the water. Then Ruthita grew tired and, leaning against my shoulder, persuaded me to tell her the story of where we were going. Before the tale was ended, her eyes were closed and her lips were parted. My arms began to ache terribly;

I wondered whether it was with holding her or because I was growing. I hoped it was because I was growing.

Dot-and-Carry-One woke up. He looked at the sun. "Time we wuz h'orf," he remarked shortly.

We had not gone far along the river-bank when we came to a tavern on our side of the water. Ruthita said that she was thirsty, so we entered. The drover spread himself out on a bench and, soliciting my invitation, called for "a pint of strong." Good beer, he said, never hurt any man if taken in moderation.

We must have sat for the best part of the morning, watching him toss off pot after pot while we gritted our feet on the sanded floor. For each pot he thanked us, taking off his battered hat to Ruthita and blowing away the froth from the top in our honor. He explained to all and sundry that we wuz his little nipper and girl wot he had losht. He losht us years ago, so long he could hardly remember. The tavern-girl entered into a discussion with him, saying that we could not be more than nine and that he was at least seventy. He became angry, demanding whether a man of seventy hadn't lived long enough to know his own children, and what bloody indifference it made to her, anyway.

It occurred to me that it might be just possible that he really was Ruthita's father. I had no idea what dying meant. I had been told that the dead were not really dead—only gone. So I thought that death might mean not being with your friends in the garden. I half expected to find my mother in the forest, just as I had hoped to bring her back on the magic carpet. So when Dot-and-Carry-One was so positive, I asked him if he had heard of the Siege of Paris. He was in a mood when he had heard of everything, been everywhere, and had had every important person for a friend. Of course he had heard of the Siege of Paris; if it hadn't been for him, to-day there wouldn't be any Paris. When I told him of General Favart, he wept copiously and called for another

The tavern-girl told him that that must be his last, and he said that it was cruel 'ard the way an old soldier were persecooted. When we had paid for his drinks, we discovered that we had only three shillings and eightpence left of our little stock of money. The tavern-girl said we were poor h'innercent lambs and she should set the police on him. The drover told her that spring, not autumn, was the lambing season.

All through the long and drowsy afternoon we wandered on. Dot-and-Carry-One seemed in no great hurry to reach his destination. Beer had had a transfiguring effect upon him. He lurched along jauntily, his hat cocked sideways on his head, winking with his one good eye at any girls we met in our path. His cares and sense of injustice were forgotten. He told us tales of his wars, painting tremendous and bloody scenes of carnage. He slew whole armies that afternoon, and at the end of each battle he was left alone, wounded but dauntless, with the dead 'uns piled high about him. He went into grisly details of the manner of their dying, and stopped now and then to show us with his stick the different ways in which you could kill a man with a sword. Cockney lovers on the river gaped after us, resting on their oars. They saw nothing but an intoxicated old ruffian in charge of a flock of sheep and two small children. But we were in hero-land, and Dot-and-Carry-One was our giant-killer.

When Ruthita got tired, he hoisted her on to his shoulders, where she rode straddling his neck, with her hands clasped about his forehead. The forest, like a green silent army, with its flags unfurled marched nearer. The sun sank lower behind us; our long lean shadows ran on before us till they lay across the backs of the sheep.

We left the marshes and entered on a white dusty road. Carriages and coaches and wagons kept passing, which made the sheep bewildered. They kept turning this way and that, bleating pitifully. Ruthita had to walk again, while Dot-and-Carry-One barked and waved his stick to keep the flock from scattering. The night came on and we

were hungry. At last Ruthita's legs gave out and she sat down by the roadside crying, saying that she was frightened and could go no further. Then Dot-and-Carry-One drove his flock into the forest, and borrowed a shilling from me and left us, promising to go and buy food with it.

The sheep lay down about the roots of the trees, and we pillowed our heads against their woolly backs. The silence became intense; the last of the twilight vanished. I was glad when Ruthita put her arms round my neck, for I too was nervous though I would not own it. We waited for the drover to return, and in waiting slept.

I woke with a start. The moon was shining; long paths of silver had been hewn between the trees. The fleece of the kneeling sheep was sparkling and dewy. Far down one of the paths I could see a limping figure approaching. He was shouting and singing and stabbing at his shadow. As he came nearer I could distinctly see that he held a bottle in his hand. Something warned me. I roused Ruthita, telling her to make no sound. We ran till we were breathless and the shouting could be no more heard.

Trees grew wider apart where we had halted. Far away a flare of light shone up; as we watched we saw that people passed before it. Hand-in-hand we advanced. Something groaned quite near us. We commenced to run, but, looking back, saw that it was only a tethered donkey. We came to the outskirts of the crowd. We wanted company badly. Burrowing under arms and legs we made our way to the front. A great linen sheet was stretched between two trees. Set up on iron rings before it was a line of cocoanuts. On either side flaring naphtha-lamps were burning. About thirty yards away from the sheet a woman was serving out wooden balls. Between the sheet and the cocoanuts a man was darting up and down, dodging the balls as they were thrown and returning them. The man and woman were calling out together, "Two shies a penny. Two shies a penny. Every ball 'its a cocoanut. Down she goes. 'Ere you are, sir. Two for the children

and one for the missis. Walk up. Walk up. Two shies a penny."

Whether a cocoanut went down or stayed up, they continued to assert in a hoarse, cracked monotone that it had fallen. Their faces were dripping with perspiration. The man returned the balls and the woman served them out again mechanically. The throwers took off their coats and hurled furiously, to the accompaniment of the shrill staccato chatter of the crowd.

Ruthita and I stood blinking in the semi-darkness, our eyes dazzled by the lamps. Suddenly I called out, and pushing my way between the throwers, commenced running up the pitch. The man behind the cocoanuts, realizing that the balls had ceased coming, stopped dodging and looked up to see what was the matter. Just then an impatient thrower hurled a ball which went whizzing over me, missed the cocoanuts, and hit the man on the head, splitting his eyebrow. I was terribly afraid that he would topple over and lie still, like Dot-and-Carry-One had told me men did in battle. Instead of that, when I came within reach of him he clutched me angrily by the shoulder, asking me what the devil I meant. The blood, creeping down his face in a slow trickle, made him look twice as fierce as when I had first met him with my Uncle Obad by the gipsy camp-fire. He drew me near to one of the lamps, smearing his forehead with the back of his hand. He recognized me.

"Oh, it's you, you young cuss, is it?"

Just then the fortune-telling girl came up, whom I had seen before with the baby on her back. She was carrying Ruthita.

"Here, Lilith," he said, speaking gruffly, "take 'im to your tent."

Then he commenced again, "Two shies a penny. Two shies a penny. Every ball 'its a cocoanut. Down she goes," etc.

I was glad to creep into the cool darkness, clinging close to Lilith's skirt. I was a little boy now, with scarcely a desire to be a husband. When I looked across my shoulder

the game was in full swing. The woman was serving out the balls; the crowd was paying its pennies; the man was dodging up and down before the sheet, avoiding the balls and returning them. I heaved a sigh of relief; then he had not succumbed—he was not yet a dead 'un.

CHAPTER VII

THE OPEN WORLD

THAT night in the tent I slept soundly, with the fortune-teller's arm about me and my head nearly touching Ruthita's across her breast. The soft rise and fall of her bosom made me dream of my mother.

Glimmerings of the early autumn sunrise crept in through holes in the canvas. I raised myself cautiously and gazed at the woman who had cared for me. I call her a woman, for she seemed to me a woman then; she was about seventeen—little more than a girl. Her face was gentle and passionate; her jet black hair streamed down in a torrent across her tawny throat and breast. She smiled in her sleep and murmured to herself; the arm which clasped Ruthita kept twitching, as though to draw her nearer. While I watched, her eyes opened; she said nothing, but lay smiling up at me. Presently she put her free arm about my neck, and drew me down so my cheek rested against hers. She turned her head and I saw that, though she looked happy, there were tears on her long dark lashes. Her lips moved and I knew what she wanted. Putting my arms about her, I kissed her good-morning.

Rousing Ruthita, she raised the flap of the tent and we slipped out. Mists were drifting across the woodland, pink and golden where the sunrise caught them, but lavender in the shadows. It was a quiet fairy world, like the face of a sleeping woman, which was pale with dew upon the forehead and copper and bronze with the streaming hair of faded foliage. Outside the door the grass was blackened in a circle where a gipsy fire had burnt. The yellow caravan stood near. In and out the bracken rabbits were

hopping, nibbling at the cool green turf. The gipsy's lurcher watched them, crouched with his nose between his paws, waiting his opportunity to steal closer. Lilith set about gathering brushwood for the fire and we helped her.

"Ruthie, am I taller?"

She eyed me judicially and shook her curls. "No. But p'raps we shall grow tall quite suddenly, when the honeymoon is ended."

I was beginning to have my doubts of that, so I changed the subject. "Lilith has a baby. She carries it on her back."

"Where does she keep it now?" asked Ruthita. "It wasn't on her back last night in the tent." Then she commenced to hop about like an eager, excited little bird. "I shall ask her. I shall ask her, Dante, and she'll let me hold it."

But when we ran to Lilith her back was straight and unbulgy. And when we asked her where she kept the baby, she dropped the bundle of sticks she was carrying and sank to her knees, with her hands pressed against her breast. She swayed to and fro, with her eyes closed, muttering in a strange language. Then she bent forward, kissing the ground and chanting words which sounded like, "Coroon! Coroon! Oh, dearie, come back. Come back!"

We heard the door of the caravan open. Lilith sprang to her feet and picked up her sticks as though ashamed of what she had been doing. The fierce man stood on the caravan steps. He strode across the grass to Lilith and laid his hand on her shoulder with a rough gesture which was almost kindly. "The wind blows, sister," he said, "and it sinks behind the moon. The flowers grow, sister, and they fall beneath the earth. Where they have gone there is rest."

He passed on, whistling to his lurcher. The gaudily dressed woman came out; while he was gone, the fire was kindled and breakfast was prepared.

During breakfast a great discussion arose in their strange language. When it was ended, Lilith took us with her into

the tent. She closed the flap carefully and began to undress us. While she was doing it she explained matters. She told us that the man was too busy just now with the cocoanut-shies to spare time to go and fetch my uncle to us. In a few days he would go, but meanwhile we must stay with them in camp. She said that they were good gipsies, but no one would believe it if they saw us with them. They would have to make us like gipsy children so no one would suspect. So she daubed our bodies all over a light brown color, and she stained my hair because it was flaxen. Then she gave us ragged clothes, without shoes or stockings, and dug a hole in the ground and hid ours. She was curious to know what had brought us to the forest; but we would not tell. We had the child's feeling that telling a grown-up would break the spell—we should never be married then, the little house would never be built, and none of the other pleasant things would happen. We should have to go back to the garden again and live always within walls.

Those days spent in our first dash for freedom stand out in my memory as among the happiest. I ate of the forbidden fruit of romance and reaped no penalties. Ruthita cried at times for her mother; but I had only to remind her of the babies she would have, and her courage returned.

The smell of the camp-fire is in my nostrils as I write; I can feel again the cool nakedness of unpaved woodlands beneath my feet and open skies above my head. I see Ruthita unsubdued and bare-legged, plunging shoulder-high into golden bracken, shouting with natural gladness, followed by the gipsy boys and girls. We tasted life in its fullness for the first time, she and I, on that fantastic honeymoon of ours. We felt in our bones and flesh the simple ecstasy of being alive—the wide, sweet cleanness of the open world. And remembering, I wonder now, as I wondered then, why men have toiled to learn everything except to be happy, and have labored with so much heaviness to build cities when the tent and the camp-fire might be theirs.

Books, schoolmasters, and universities have taught me much since then. They have spattered the windows of my soul with knowledge to prevent my looking out. Luckily I discovered what they were doing and stopped the rascals. But I knew more things that were essentially god-like before they commenced their work. The major part of what they taught me was a weariness to the flesh in the learning, and a burden to the brain when learnt. Of how many days of shouting and sunshine they robbed me with their mistaken kindness. Of what worth is a Euclid problem at forty, when compared with the memory of a childhood's day of flowers, and meadows, and happiness?

For twenty years my father sat prisoner at a desk, unbeautifully and doggedly driving his pen across countless pages that he might be able to buy me wisdom. With all his years of sacrifice and my years of laborious study, he gave me nothing which was half so valuable as that which a boy of nine stole for himself in his ignorance in the forest. There I learnt that the sound of wind in trees is the finest music in the world; that the power to feel in one's own body the wholesome beauties of nature is more rewarding than wealth; that to know how to abandon oneself to the simple kindness of living people is a wiser knowledge than all the elaborate and codified wisdom of the dead.

We roamed the countryside with Lilith by day, listening to her telling fortunes. By night we slept in her arms in the tent. Only one thing was forbidden us—to speak with strangers. But there was one man who recognized us in spite of that. It was on the first morning. We were sitting by the side of the road with the fierce man; he was showing us how to make a snare for a rabbit. We were so interested that we did not notice a flock of sheep approaching until they were quite close. Then I looked up and caught the eye of old Dot-and-Carry-One burning in his head, glaring out at us as if it would fly from its socket. He would have spoken had he dared, but just then the fierce man saw him. He sank his chin upon his breast and, for all that he was “a human, made in Gawd's h'image,”

limped away into the distance in a cloud of dust, as meekly sheepish as any of the sheep he followed.

Ruthita spent a lot of her time in searching for Lilith's baby. She wanted so badly to hold it. We felt quite certain that she had hidden it somewhere, as she had our clothes. Even if it was a dead 'un, it was absurd to suppose that a person so clever as to tell fortunes should not know where it might be found. We determined to watch her. We thought that if her baby was really dead and she went to it by stealth, then by following her we should be able to find my mother and, perhaps, Ruthita's father. Ruthita had already abandoned the dread that Dot-and-Carry-One had had anything to do with her entrance into the world.

Naphtha-lamps were extinguished. The crowd of merry-makers had departed. I was roused by Lilith stirring. Very gently she eased her arm from under me. I kept my eyes tightly shut and feigned that I was undisturbed. Cautiously she pulled aside the flap of the tent and stole out. I rose to my feet when she had gone. Ruthita was sleeping soundly, her small face cushioned in her hand. Without waking her I followed.

Near to the caravan the camp-fire smoldered, making a splash of red like a pool of blood in the blackness. As I watched, it was momentarily blotted out by a moving shadow. The lurcher shook himself and growled. Lilith's voice reached me, telling him to lie down. A bank of cloud lay across the moon, but I knew the way she went by the rustle of the fallen leaves, turning beneath her tread. I followed her down the glades of the forest, peering after her, glancing behind me at the slightest sound, timid lest I might lose her, timid lest I might lose myself, stealing on tiptoe into the unknown with sobbing, stifled breath. The ground began to descend into a hollow at the bottom of which a pond lay black and sullen. A tall beech stood at its edge, spreading out its branches and leaning across it as if to hide it. The leaves beneath her footsteps ceased to stir.

When I could no longer hear her, a horrible, choking sense of solitude took hold of me. What if she had entered into the tree and should never return? Without her, how should I find my way back? I crept as near the pond as I dared, and crouched among the dead leaves, trembling. The water began to splash. "Someone," I thought, "is rising out of it." Little waves, washing in the rushes, caused the brittle reeds to shake and shiver, whispering in terror among themselves. A low sing-song muttering commenced. It came from the middle of the pond. I tried to stop breathing. It seemed quite possible that the baby was hidden there.

The bank of cloud trailed across the sky. The yellow harvest moon dipped, broad and smiling, into the lattice-work of boughs which roofed the dell.

In the middle of the pond, knee-deep, Lilith stood. She had cast aside her Romany rags and rose from the water tall and splendid. Her tawny body was a gold statue glistening beneath the moon. Her night-black hair fell sheer from her shoulders like a silken shadow. She was bending forward, peering eagerly beneath the water's surface, whispering hurried love-words. Of all that she said I could only catch the words, "Coroon. Coroon. Come back, little dearest. Come back." She laughed gladly and held out her arms, as though there drifted up towards her that which she sought. I could see nothing, for her back was towards me. Still lower she bent till her lips kissed the water's surface; plunging her arms in elbow-deep, she seemed to support the thing which she saw there.

"Lilith, oh Lilith!" I cried.

She started and turned. I feared she was going to be angry. "Show me my Mama," I whispered.

She put her finger to her lips, and beckoned, and nodded.

Hastily I undressed, tossing my rags beside hers. I waded out to where she was standing. The night air was chilly. She gave me her hand and drew me to her. Placing me before her, so that I could gaze into the pond like

a mirror, she chanted over and over a low, wild tune. She peered above my shoulders. At first I could see only my own reflection and hers. Then, as she sang, the water moved, the inky blackness reddened; I forgot everything, the cold, Lilith, my terror, and lived only in that which was coming.

In the bottom of the pool, infinitely distant, a picture grew. It came so near that I thought it would touch me; I became a part of it. I saw my mother. She was seated by a fire in an unlighted room. A little boy lay in her lap with his arms about her. She glanced up at me smiling faintly, gazing into my eyes directly. For a moment I saw her distinctly, and caught again the fragrance of violets that clung about her. The water rippled and the vision died away in smoke and cloud. Lilith gathered me to her cold wet breast and carried me to the shore and dressed me. Without knowing why, I knew that this was a happening that I must not tell.

We returned to camp. Woods were stirring. Shadows were thinning. Dawn was breaking. The coldness in the air became intense. We threw branches on the fire and blew the smoldering embers, till sparks began to fly and twigs to crackle. Lilith sat with me in her arms, and hushed and mothered me. I was not ashamed; for five years I had wanted just that. I was glad that she understood. Ruthita could not see me; nobody but the dawn would ever know. So I fell asleep and went back to the fragrance of violets, the fire, and the cosy darkened room.

CHAPTER VIII

RECAPTURED

RUTHITA and I were terribly puzzled about that baby. We couldn't make out how it had found its way into the world. We supposed that God had made a mistake in sending it to Lilith, and that was why He had taken it back.

Our difficulty rose from the fact that Lilith did not appear ever to have been married. The fierce man was not her husband. So far as we could discover from the gipsy children she had never had a husband. Then she couldn't have had a honeymoon: and, if she had never had a honeymoon, she oughtn't to have had a baby. Our ideas on the question of birth were utterly disorganized. There was only one explanation—that we had been misinformed by Hetty and people could have babies by themselves. The effect of this conjecture on Ruthita was revolutionizing: it made our honeymoon unnecessary and me entirely dispensable. She had only been persuaded to elope for the sake of exchanging dolls for babies, and now it appeared she could have them and her mother as well. I had no argument left with which to combat her desire to return. There was only one way of arriving at the truth on the subject, and that was by inquiring of Lilith. Neither of us would have done this for worlds after the way she had cried when we found that her back was no longer bulgy.

The days grew shorter and the forest became bare. We could see long distances now between the tree-trunks; it was as though the branches had fisted their hands. Holiday-seekers came to the cocoanut-shies less and less. The

fierce man, whom we learnt to call G'liath, had hardly any bruises on his face and hands; he dodged the balls easily. The few chance throwers had no crowd to make them reckless; they shied singly now and not in showers. The gaudily dressed woman lost her hoarseness. She no longer had to shout night and morning, "Two shies a penny. Two shies a penny. Every ball 'its a cocoanut. Down she goes," etc. Why should she? There was no one to get excited—nobody to pay her pennies. Instead she sat by the fire, weaving wicker-baskets, watching the pearl-colored smoke go up in whiffs and eddies. Though she seldom said anything, she had taken a fancy to Ruthita and would spread for her a corner of her skirt that she might sit beside her while she worked.

Every day as Ruthita became more sure that she could have a baby all by herself, she wanted to go home more badly. One evening the gaudy woman found her crying. She told G'liath that next morning he must harness in his little moke and go for Mr. Spreckles. I did not hear her tell him, but Lilith told me when she came to lie down beside me in the tent.

That night she held me closer. I could feel her heart thumping. She roused me continually in the darkness to ask me needless questions. Whether I would ever forget her. "No." Whether I would like to see her again. "Yes." Whether I would like to become a gipsy. "Wouldn't I!"

She was silent for so long that I began to drowse. I awoke with the tightening of her arms about me. When I lifted my face to hers, she commenced to kiss me passionately. "You shall. You shall," she said. "I'll make a gipsy of you, so you'll always remember and never be content with their closed-in world. They'll take you from me to-morrow, but your heart will never be theirs."

I didn't understand, but at dawn she showed me. Frost lay on the ground. Every little blade of grass was stiff and sword-like. It was as though the hair of the world had turned white from shock and was standing on end.

She led me away through the tall stark forest to a glade so secret that no one could observe us. At first I thought she was escaping with me, carrying me off to her gipsy-land. But she made me kneel down beside her. As the sun wheeled above the cold horizon she snatched a little knife from beneath her dress, and pricked her wrist and mine so that they bled. She held her hand beneath our wrists, catching the blood in her palm so it mingled. Then she let it drip through her fingers, making scarlet stains on the frosted turf.

As it fell she spoke to the grass and the trees and the air, telling them that I was hers and, because our blood was mingled, was one of them. "Whenever he hears your voice," she said, "it will speak to him of me. If he goes where you do not grow, oh grass, then the trees shall call him back. If he goes where you do not grow, oh trees, then the wind shall tell him. His hand shall be as ours, against the works of men. When he hears your voice, oh grass, or your voice, oh trees, or your voice, oh winds, he shall turn his face from walls and come back. Though he leaves us he shall always hear us calling, for he is ours!"

And it seemed to me when her voice had ceased that I heard the grass nodding its head. From the dawn came a breath of wind, sweeping through the trees, stooping their leafless branches as though they gave assent.

That morning for the first time we had breakfast in the caravan. After breakfast Lilith and I went out together, hand-in-hand. G'liath was harnessing in his donkey. We watched him drive down the road and vanish. I did not want to go back and he knew it; he looked ashamed of himself. The country was bitter and cheerless; it had an atmosphere of parting—everything was withered. Birds huddled close on branches with ruffled feathers. Fields were harsh and cracked.

"Little brother," Lilith said, "one day you will be a man. Until then they will keep you prisoner and try to make you forget all the things which you and I have learnt.

They will tell you that the trees have no voices: that it is only the wind that stirs them. They will tell you that rivers are only water flowing. But remember that out in the open they are all waiting for you, and that the other people who have no bodies are there."

I thought of the picture I had seen in the pool and knew what she meant.

Towards evening we returned to the camp. The melancholy autumn twilight lay about us; in the heart of it the fire burnt red. We sat round it in silence, watching the hard white road through the trees and listening for G'liath coming back. "Ruthita," I whispered, "do you think we shall find the little house?"

She shook her head doubtfully, as if she scarcely cared. She was thinking of the lighted room, perhaps, and the long white bed, where her mother was eagerly awaiting her.

Coming up the road we heard a sharp tap-a-tap. Dancing in and out the tree-trunks we saw the golden eyes of carriage-lamps. The dog-cart and Dollie came into sight and halted; my Uncle Obad jumped out. He had come alone to fetch us; I was glad of that. I could explain things to him so much more easily than to my father, and he was sure to understand. Catching sight of me by the fire, he ran forward and lifted me up in his arms. All he could say was, "Well, well, well!" His face was beaming; every little wrinkle in his face was trembling. He hugged me so tightly that he took away my breath. I didn't get a chance to speak until he had set me down. Then I said, "Uncle Obad, this is Ruthita."

He held out his hand to her gravely. "I'm pleased to meet you, Mrs. Dante Cardover," he said. Then, because she was such a little girl and her face looked so thin and wistful, he took her in his arms and hugged her as well.

Suddenly the gaudy woman remembered that we were still clothed in our gipsy rags. She wanted to take us into the caravan and dress us, but Uncle Obad wouldn't hear

of it. He insisted on carrying us off to Pope Lane just as we were.

It was night when he said, "Dollie is rested; we must be going." When we rose to our feet to say good-by, Lilith was not there. He lifted us into the dog-cart and wrapped rugs about our shoulders to make us cozy. Then he jumped in beside us and we had our last look at the camp. The gaudy woman was standing up by the fire with her children huddled about her skirts. I could see the gleam of her ear-rings shaking, the lighted window of the caravan in the background, and the lurcher sneaking in and out the shadows. G'liath and his donkey travelled slowly; they had not returned when we left. Uncle Obad cracked his whip; we started forward across the turf and were soon bowling between the dim skeletons of trees down the hard road homeward.

Ruthita crept closer to me. She may have been cold and she may have been lonely, but I think she was just feeling how flat things were now our great adventure was over. She had feared it while it lasted; now, womanlike, she was wishing that it was not quite ended. Every now and then she drew her fingers across my face—a little love-trick she had. She leant her head against my shoulder and was soon sleeping soundly.

"Old chap, why did you do it?"

I looked up at my uncle; I could not see his face because of the darkness. His voice was very solemn and kindly.

"We couldn't see anything in the garden," I said; "we wanted to find where the pigeons went."

"But why did you take the little girl?"

I hesitated about telling. It might spoil what was left of the magic; I still had a faint hope that by the time we reached Pope Lane I might have grown into a man. And then, in telling, I might do Hetty a damage. Instead of answering, I asked him a question.

"When you're married, you get everything you want, don't you?"

"That depends on what you call everything, Dante."

"Well, money, and a house, and a pony, and babies."

"Not always."

He spoke softly. Then I knew I oughtn't to have mentioned babies, because, like Lilith, he hadn't any.

"It wasn't I who wanted the babies," I explained hurriedly; "that was Ruthie. She wanted them instead of dolls to play with. I wanted to be allowed to go in and out, like the children with the magic carpet."

He knew at once what I meant. "You didn't want to have grown people always bothering, telling you to do this and not to do that, and locking doors behind you? You wanted always to be free and jolly, like you and I are together? And you thought that you could be like that if you were married?"

He slowed Dollie down to a walk.

"Little man, you've been trying to get just what everyone's reaching after. When you're a boy you say, 'I'll have it when I'm a man.' When you're a man you say, 'I'll have it when I'm married.' You've been searching for perpetual happiness. You'll never have it in this world, Dante. And don't you see why you'll never have it? You hurt other people in trying to get it. Your father and Ruthita's mother, all of us have been very anxious. I've often been tempted to run away myself because I'm not much use to anybody. But that would mean leaving someone I love; so I've had to stop on and face it out. You ran away to enjoy yourself, and other people were sorry. Other people always have to be sorry when a fellow does that."

He shook the reins over Dollie and she commenced to trot again. Presently he said, half-speaking to himself, "There's a better word than happiness, and that's duty. If a chap does his duty the best he can, he makes other folk happy. Then he finds his own happiness by accident, within himself. I'm a queer one to be talking—I'm not awfully successful. I've run away a little. But you must do better. And if you can't bear things, just *imagine*.

What's the difference between the things you really have and the things you pretend? Imagination is the magic carpet; you can pretend yourself anything and anywhere. If you've learnt that secret, they can lock all the doors—it won't matter. I can't put it plainer; there are things that it isn't right for you to understand—this business about marriage. You'll know when you're a man. Now promise that you'll never run away again."

I promised.

When we got to Pope Lane it must have been very late. I suppose I fell asleep on the journey, for I remember nothing more until the light flashed in my eyes and my father was bending over me. Ruthita wasn't there; she had been left already at her mother's house. My father had me in his arms. He was standing in the hall. The door was wide open and my uncle was going down the steps, calling "Good-night" as he went. Behind me I could see Hetty peering over the banisters in a gray flannel night-dress—her night-dresses were all of gray flannel. When my father turned, she scuttled away like a frightened rabbit.

He carried me into his study—just as I was, clad in my gipsy rags—and closed the door behind him with a slam. His lamp on the table was turned low. The floor was littered with books and papers. A fire in the hearth was burning brightly. He drew up an easy-chair to the blaze and sat down, still holding me to him. I was always timid with my father, especially when we were alone together. This time I was very conscious of wrong-doing. I waited to hear him say something; but he remained silent, staring into the fire. The lamp flickered lower and lower, and went out.

"Father, I—I didn't mean to hurt you."

Then I saw that he was crying. His tears splashed down. His face had lost that stern look. I was shaken by his sobs as he held me.

"Little son. My little son," he whispered.

The room grew fainter. The pictures on the walls be-

came shadowy. My eyes opened and closed. When I awoke the gray light of morning was stealing in at the window. The fire had fallen away in ashes. The air was chilly. My father was sitting in the easy-chair, his head sunk forward—but his arms were still about me.

CHAPTER IX

THE SNOW LADY

My father never asked me why I had run away or where I had gone. His tongue was ever stubborn at loving with words. With Hetty it was different. When my father had wakened and let me out of his arms to go upstairs and dress, she caught me into her bosom and half-smothered me, scolding and comforting by turns. Her corsets hurt me and her starched print-dress was harsh; I was glad when she left off and set me down on the bed.

"And who ever 'eard the likes o' that," she said: "a little boy to run away from his dear Pa and take with 'im a little sweet-'eart as we never knew 'e 'ad. Oh, the deceit of children for all they looks so h'innercent! And 'ere was your dear Pa a-tearin' all the 'air out of 'is 'ead. And 'ere was me and John—we couldn't do no work and we couldn't do nothin' for thinkin' where you'd went. And there was you a-livin' with those dirty gipsies and wearin' their dirty rags——"

"They're not dirty," I interrupted, "and I shan't like you if you talk like that."

"Well, I'm only tellin' you the truth; you was always perwerse and 'eadstrong."

"You didn't tell me the truth when you told me about marriage," I said. "Everything's just the same as when we left. We ar'n't any taller, and we hav'n't got a little house, and——"

She sat back on her heels and stared at me. "Oh, Lor," she burst out, "was that why you did it?" And then she began to laugh and laugh. Her face grew red and again she fell upon me, until her corsets cut into me to such an extent that I called to her to leave off.

"What I told you was gorspel true," she said solemnly, "but you didn't understand. That's wot 'appens to wimmen when they goes away with men. I wasn't speakin' of little boys and girls. But it'll never 'appen to you when you grow up if you tell anybody wot I said."

That morning after breakfast, instead of going into his study to work, my father led me round to the Favarts'. As we came up the path I saw Ruthita at the window watching for us. Monsieur Favart opened the door to our knock. He said something to my father in French, shook me by the hand gravely, and led the way upstairs. We entered a room at the back of the house, overlooking the garden. A lady, almost as small as Ruthita, was lying on a couch with cushions piled behind her head. She was dressed completely in white; she had dark eyes and white hair, and a face that somehow surprised you because it was so young and little. From the first I called her the Snow Lady to myself.

She held out her hand to me and then, instead, put her arm about my waist, smiling up at me. "So you are Dante, the little boy who wanted to marry my little girl?"

Her voice was more soft and emotional than any voice I had ever heard. It held me, and kept me from noticing anything but her. It seemed as though all the eagerness of living, which other people spend in motion, was stored up in that long white throat of hers and delicate scarlet mouth.

"You can't marry Ruth yet, you know," she said; "you hav'n't any money. But if you like, you may go and kiss her."

She turned me about and there was Ruthita standing behind me. I did what I was told, shyly and perfunctorily. There was no sense of pleasure in doing what you were ordered to do just to amuse grown people. The Snow Lady laughed gaily. "There, take him out into the garden, Ruthita, and teach him to do it properly."

As I left the room, I saw that my father had taken my place by the couch. Monsieur Favart was looking out of

the window, his hands folded on the head of his cane and his chin resting on them.

We played in the garden together, but much of the charm had gone out of our playing now that it was allowed. The game we played was gipsies in the forest. We gathered leaves and made a fire, pretending we were again in camp. I was G'liath; Ruthita was sometimes the gaudy woman and sometimes Lilith telling fortunes. But the pretense was tame after the reality.

"Ruthie," I said, "we ar'n't married. What Hettie told me was all swank. It's only true of men and women, and not of boys and girls."

"But we can grow older."

"Yes. But it'll take ages."

She folded her hands in her pinafore nervously.

"We can go on loving till then," she said.

On the way home my father told me that he liked Ruthita—liked her so much that he had arranged with Madam Favart to have a door cut in the wall between the two gardens so that we could go in and out. I didn't tell him that I preferred climbing over; he could scarcely guess it for himself. There was no excitement in being pushed into the open and told to go and play with Ruthita. It was all too easy. The fun had been in no one knowing that I did play with such a little girl—not even knowing that there was a Ruthita in the world. We tried to overcome this by always pretending that we were doing wrong when we were together. We would hide when we heard anybody coming. I despised the door and only went through it when a grown person was present, otherwise I entered by way of the apple-tree and the wall. My father caught me at it, and couldn't understand why I did it. Hetty said it was because I liked being grubby.

Through the gray autumn months I wandered the garden, listening to the dead leaves whispering together. "They'll take you from me, but your heart will never be theirs," Lilith had said, and I tried to fancy that the rustling of leaves was Lilith's voice calling. It was curious

how she had plucked out my affections and made them hers.

Often I would steal into the tool-house and tell the white hen all about it. But she also was a source of disillusionment. After long waiting I found one egg in her nest. I thought she must be as glad about it as I was, so left it there a little while for her to look at. I thought the sight of it would spur her on to more ambitious endeavors. But when I came back her beak was yellowy and the egg had vanished. After this unnatural act of cannibalism I told her no more secrets; she had proved herself unworthy. Shortly afterwards she died—perhaps of remorse. I made my peace with her by placing her in a cardboard shoe-box for a coffin and giving her a most handsome funeral.

One evening, when I had been put to bed, I stole to the window to gaze into the blackness. I saw a man with a lantern go across our lawn and disappear by the apple-tree through the door in the wall. After that I watched. Nearly every night it happened. I was always too sleepy to stay awake to see at what hour he came back. But I knew that he did come back, for with the first fall of snow I traced his returning footsteps. They came from Monsieur Favart's door and entered in at our study-window. So I guessed that the man was my father.

Madam Favart seemed to be growing stronger; she was able to get up and walk about. Sometimes I would go into her house for tea, and she would sit by the firelight and tell Ruthita and myself stories. She used to try and get me to climb on her knee while she told them. I always refused, because my mother used to do that. The Snow Lady used to laugh at me and say, "Ruthita, Dante won't make love to Mother. Isn't he silly?" Then I would grow sulky and sit as far off as I could.

When Christmas came round, the Favarts were invited over to spend it with us. The Snow Lady brought a bunch of misletoe with her and hung it about our house. After dinner the General fell asleep in his chair, and we children

played hide and seek together. I wanted to hide so securely that Ruthita would never catch me. It was getting dark, and I knew that she wouldn't hunt for me in my father's study. I was a little awed myself at going there. I pushed open the door. The room was unlighted. I entered, and then halted at the sound of voices whispering. Standing in the window, silhouetted against the snow, were my father and Madam Favart. He was holding a sprig of misletoe over her; his arm was about her, and they were leaning breast to breast. She saw me first and started back from him, just as Hetty had done when I found her with John. Then my father, turning sharply, saw me. He called to me sternly, "Dante, what are you doing, sir?" He sounded almost afraid because I had been watching. Then he called again more softly, "Dante, my boy, come here."

But a strange rebellious horror possessed me. It seemed as though something were tearing out my heart. I was angry, fiercely angry because he had been disloyal to my mother. At that moment I hated him, but hated Madam Favart much worse. I knew now why she had told me stories, and why she had wanted me to climb on her knee, and why she had tried to force me to make love to her. I rushed from the room and down the passage. Ruthita ran out laughing to catch me, but I pushed her aside roughly and unjustly. I wanted to get away by myself and fled out into the snow-covered garden. My father came to the door and called. But Madam Favart was with him; I could see by the gaslight, which fell behind them, the way she pressed towards him. I could hear her merry contralto laugh, and refused to answer.

"He'll come by himself," she said.

When the door closed and they left me, I felt miserably lonely. They had been wicked and they were not sorry. Hetty said that God was twice as angry with you for not being sorry as He was with you for doing wrong. Hetty knew everything about God; she used to hold long conversations with Him every night in her gray flannel night-

dress. Soon the snow began to melt into my shoes and the frost to nip my fingers. I wished they would come out again and call me.

I became pathetic over the fact that it was Christmas. I pictured to myself a possible death as a result of exposure. I saw myself dying in a beautiful calm, forgiving everybody, and with everybody kneeling by my bedside shaken with sobbing; the sobs of Madam Favart and my father were to be the loudest. I was to be stretching out long white hands, trying to quiet them; but their sense of guilt was to have placed them beyond all bounds of consolation. Every time I tried to comfort them they were to cry twice as hard. Then I saw my funeral and the big lily wreaths: "From his broken-hearted father"; "From Madam Favart with sincere regrets"; "From Hetty who told God untruths about him"; "From Ruthita who loved him." And in the midst of these tokens of grief I lay fully conscious of everything, arrayed in a gray flannel night-shirt, opening one eye when no one was looking, and winking at Uncle Obad.

I began to feel little pangs of hunger, and my pride gave way before them. Reluctantly I stole nearer the house and peeked into the study. They were all there seated round the fire, callously enjoying themselves. The secret was plainly out—my father was holding Madam Favart's hand. Ruthita was cuddled against my father's shoulder; she was evidently reconciled rather more than stoically. I tapped on the pane. The old General saw me. He signed to the others to remain still. He threw up the window and lifted me into the warmth. I believe he understood. Perhaps he felt just as I was feeling. At any rate, when it was decreed that I should go to bed at once and drink hot gruel, he slipped a crown-piece into my hand and looked as though he hadn't done it.

Within a month the marriage was celebrated, my father being a methodical man who hated delays and loved short-cuts. It was a vicarious affair; Ruthita and I had taken the honeymoon, and our parents were married. If Uncle

Obad hadn't given me the white hen, and the hen hadn't flown over the wall, and I hadn't followed, these things would never have happened.

I grew to admire the Snow Lady immensely. She always called me her little lover. She never ordered me to do anything or played the mother, but flirted with me and trusted to my chivalry to recognize her wants. We played a game of pretending. It had only one disadvantage, that it shut Ruthita out from our game, for one couldn't court two ladies at once. I learnt to kiss Ruthita as a habit and to take her, as boys will their sisters, for granted. It is only on looking back that I realize how beautiful and gentle she really was, and what life would have been without her.

General Favart lived in the other house through the door in the wall. He came to visit us rarely. He leant more heavily on his cane, and his cloak seemed to have become blacker, his hair whiter, and his scar more prominent. He could scarcely speak a word of English, so I never knew what he thought. But it seemed to me he was sorrowing. One day we children were told that he was dead; after that the door between the two gardens was taken down and the hole in the wall bricked up.

BOOK II

THE PULLING DOWN OF THE WALLS

*And man returned to the ground out
of which he was taken, and his wife
bare children and he builded walls.
But thou shalt think an evil thought
and say, "I will go up to the land of
unwalled villages."*

CHAPTER I

THE RED HOUSE

"DANTE, it's time you went to school."

For the past three years, since he had married the Snow Lady, my father had given me lessons in his study for the last hour of every morning before lunch. It had been the Snow Lady's idea; she said I was growing up a perfect ignoramus.

My father tilted up his spectacles to his forehead, and gazed across the table at me thoughtfully. "Yes," he repeated, "I'll be sorry to lose you, my boy; but it's time you went to school."

He was to lose me; then I was to go away! My heart sank, and leapt, and sank again with a dreadful joy of expectation. In my childish way I had always been impatient of the present—a Columbus ceaselessly watching for the first trace of seaweed broken loose from the shores of the unknown. Change, which at mid-life we so bitterly resent, was at that time life's great allurements.

The school selected was one of the smaller public-schools, lying fifteen miles distant from Stoke Newington. It was called the Red House and stood on Eden Hill. It was situated in lovely country, so my father said, and had for its head-master a man with whom he was slightly acquainted, whose name was the Reverend Robert Sneed.

For the next few weeks I was a semi-hero. Ruthita regarded me with the kind of pitying awe that a bullock inspires in children, when they meet it being driven lowing along a road to be slaughtered. Everyone became busy over preparations for my departure—even the Snow Lady, who seldom worked. I was allowed to sit up quite late,

watching her pretty fingers flashing the needle in and out the flannel that grew into shirts for me to wear. Ruthita would snuggle up beside me, her long black curls tickling my cheek. There were lengthy silences. Then Ruthita would look up at her mother and say, "Mumsie, I don't know whatever we shall do without him." And sometimes, when she said it, the Snow Lady would laugh in her Frenchy way and answer, "Why, Ruthita, what's one little boy? He's so tiny; he won't leave much empty space." But once, it was the night before I left, she choked in the middle of her laughing and took us both into her arms, telling us that she loved us equally. "I can't think what I'll do without my little lover," she said.

Of a sudden I had become a person of importance. The servants no longer made a worry of doing things for me. They watched me going about the house as though it were for the last time, and spoke of me to one another as, "Poor little chap." I had only to express a want to have it gratified. I was treated as the State treats a condemned criminal on the day of his execution, when they let him choose his breakfast. I gloried in my eminence.

It was arranged that my uncle should drive me to the Red House. Before I went, I was loaded with good advice. My father sent for me to his study one night and, with considerable embarrassment, alluded to subjects of which I had no knowledge, imploring me to listen to no evil companions but to keep pure. His language was so delicately veiled that I was none the wiser. I thought he referred to such boyish peccadilloes as jam stealing and telling lies. Even the Snow Lady, who took delight in being frivolous, read me a moral story concerning the rapid degeneration, through cigarettes and beer-drinking, of a boy with the face of an angel. Neither of these temptations was mine, and I had never regarded myself as particularly angelic in appearance. They beat about the bush, hunting ghostly passions with allegories.

I noticed that Ruthita would absent herself for an hour or more at a stretch. When I followed her up to her room

the door was locked, and she would beseech me with tears in her voice not to peek through the key-hole. The mystery was explained when she presented me with a knitted muffler, the wool for which she had purchased from her own savings. I came across it, moth-eaten and faded, in my old school play-box the other day. It was cold weather when she made it, for a little girl to sit in a bedroom without a fire. I hope I thanked her sufficiently and did not accept her surprise as though it were expected.

On an afternoon in January I departed. Then I realized for the first time what going away from home meant. The horror of the unknown, not the adventure, pressed upon me. We all pretended to be very gay—all except Hetty, who threw her apron over her head and, in the old scripture phrase, lifted up her voice and wept. They accompanied me out of the garden, down Pope Lane, to where the dog-cart was tethered. I mounted reluctantly, stretching out the last moment to its greatest length, and took my place beside Uncle Obad. My father had his pen behind his ear, I remember. It seemed to me as though the pen were saying, "Hurry up now and get off. Your father can't waste all day over little boys." Dollie lifted her head and began to trot. The Snow Lady waved and waved, smiling bravely. Then Ruthita broke from the group and ran after us down the long red street for a little way. We turned a corner and they were lost to sight.

I drew nearer to my uncle, pressing Ruthita's muffler to my lips and gazing straight before me.

"What—what'll it be like?"

He shook his head. "Couldn't say," he muttered huskily.

After about an hour's driving, he broke the silence with a kindly effort to make conversation. He told me that we were on the Great North Road, where there used to be highwaymen. He spoke of Dick Turpin and some of his exploits. He pointed out a public-house at which highwaymen used to stay. He could not stir my imagination—it was otherwise occupied. I was wondering why I should

be sent to school, if my going made everyone unhappy. I was picturing the snug nursery, with the lamp unlighted, and the fire burning, and Ruthita seated all alone on the rug before the fire.

We left the Great North Road, striking across country, through frosty lanes. My uncle ceased speaking; he himself was uninterested in what he had been saying. We passed groups of children playing before clustered cottages, and laborers plodding homeward whistling. It seemed strange to me that they should all be so cheerful and should not realize what was happening inside me.

We came in sight of the Red House. It could be seen at a great distance, for it stood out gauntly on the crest of Eden Hill, and the sunset lay behind it. In the lowlands night was falling; lights were springing up, twinkling cheerfully. But the Red House did not impress me as cheerful—it had no lights, and struck me with the chill and repression that one feels in passing by a prison.

"Well, old chap, we're nearly there," said my uncle with a futile attempt to be jolly.

I darted out my hand and dragged on the reins. "Don't—don't drive so fast. Let Dollie walk."

He looked down at me slantwise. "You've got to be brave, old chap. Nothing's as bad as it seems at the time. Nothing's so bad that it can't be lived through. Why, one day you'll be looking back and telling yourself that these were your happiest days."

Despite his optimism, he did as I requested and let Dollie walk the rest of the way. While she climbed the hill, we got out and walked beside her. My uncle put his hand in his pocket, and drew out a half-crown. He balanced it in his palm; tossed it; put it back into his pocket; drew it out again. "Here, Dante," he said at last, "see what I've found. You'd best take it."

As we approached nearer, he was again moved to generosity. He was moved three times, to be exact; each time he considered the matter carefully, then rushed the coin

at me. He gave me seven shillings in all. I am sure he could ill afford them.

At the top of the hill he beckoned me to jump into the trap. It was fitting, I suppose, that we should drive up to my place of confinement grandly. Then a great idea seized me. My box was under the seat behind. I had all my belongings with me. There were no walls to restrain us now.

"Uncle," I whispered, "I don't want to go there. You once said you were tired of houses. Why shouldn't we run away?"

He heard the tremble in my voice. He lifted me in beside him and drove along the outside of the school-walls, not entering at the gate.

"It's beastly hard," he said, "and the trouble is that I can't explain it. All through life you'll be wanting to run away, and all through life, if you're not a coward, you won't be able. You see, people have to earn a living in this world, and to earn a living they must be educated. Your father's trying to give you the best education he can, and he means to be kind. But it's a darned shame, this not being able to do what you like. I can't run away with you, old chap. There's nothing for it; you've just got to bear it."

He stopped, searching for words. He wanted to tell me something really comforting and wasn't content with what he had said. He found it. Turning round in the dog-cart, he threw his arm about my shoulder and pointed above my head, "Look up, there." I raised my eyes and saw the blue black sky like an inverted cup, with a red smudge round the western rim where a mouth of blood had stained it. One by one the silver stars were coming out and disappearing, like tiny bubbles which break and form again. As I looked, night seemed to deepen; horizons dropped back; the earth fell away. The sky was no longer a cup; it was nothing measurable. It was a drifting sea of freedom, and I was part of it.

"They can rob you of a lot of things," my uncle said,

"but they can never take that from you. It's like the world of your imagination, something that can't be stolen, and that you can't sell, and that you can't buy. It's always yours."

We drove through the gate to the main entrance. My box was deposited in the hall. My uncle shook hands with me in formal manner when he said good-by, for the school-porter was present. He turned round sharply to cut proceedings short, and disappeared into the night. I listened to his wheels growing fainter. For the first time I was utterly alone.

CHAPTER II

CHILDISH SORROWS AND CHILDISH COMFORTERS

IN delicate schoolboy slang, I was a new-bug—a thing to be poked and despised, and not to be spoken to for the first few days. There were other new-bugs, which was some consolation; but we were too shy to get acquainted. We moped about the playground sullen and solitary, like crows on a plowed field. Every now and then some privileged person, who was not a new-bug, would bang our shins with a hockey-stick; after which we would hop about on one leg for a time, looking more like crows than ever.

The Snow Lady had packed fifty oranges in my box. I made holes in the tops of them with my thumb and rammed in lumps of sugar, sucking out the juice. Not because I was greedy, but because there seemed nothing else to do, I ate every one of the fifty the first day. The following night I was ill, which did not help my popularity. One dark-haired person, about my own age, with a jolly freckled face, took particular offense at my misdemeanor. His real name was Buzzard, but he was nicknamed the Bantam because of his size and his temper. He never said a word about the oranges, but he punished me for having been ill by stamping on my toes. He did this whenever he passed me, looking in the opposite direction in an absent-minded fashion. My quietness in putting up with him seemed to irritate him.

The afternoon was frosty; I was hobbling miserably about the playground with Ruthita's muffler round my throat. It was a delicate baby-pink, and the Bantam easily

caught sight of it. He came up and jerking it from me, trod on it. I had never fought in my life, but my wretchedness made me reckless. I thought of little Ruthita and the long cold hours she had spent in making it. It seemed that he had insulted her. I hit him savagely on the nose.

Immediately there were cries of, "A fight! A fight!" Games were stopped. Boys came running from every direction. Even the new-bugs lifted up their heads and began to take an interest in the landscape.

"Now you've done it," the Bantam shouted.

He started out, accompanied by the crowd to the bottom of the playground. I followed. The laboratory, a long black shed, stood there, with a roof of galvanized iron and rows of bottles arranged in the windows. Behind it we were out of sight of masters, unless they happened to be carrying on experiments inside.

A ring was formed. The Bantam commenced to take off his coat and collar. I did likewise. A horrid sickening sense of defenselessness came over me. I experienced what the early Christians must have felt when they gazed round the eager amphitheatre, and heard the lions roaring.

A big fellow stepped up. "Here, new-bug, d'you know how to fight?"

When I shook my head, he grinned at me cheerfully. "Hold your arms well up, double your fists, and go for him."

The advice was more easy to give than to put into action. The Bantam was on top of me in a flash. He made for my face at first, but I lowered my head and kept my arms up, so he was content to pummel me about the body. He hurt, and hurt badly; I had never been treated so roughly.

Something happened. Perhaps it was a fierce realization of the injustice of everything—the injustice of being sent there by people whom I loved, the injustice of not being spoken to, the injustice of the boys jeering because I was getting thrashed. I felt that I did not care how much I got damaged if only I might kill the Bantam. He thumped me on the nose as I looked up; my eyes filled with

tears. I dashed in at him, banging him about the head. I heard his teeth rattle. I heard the shouting, "Hurrah! Go it, new-bug. Well done, new-bug." In front of me the wintry sunset lay red. I remember wondering whether it was sunset or blood. Then the Bantam tried to turn and run. I caught him behind the ear. He tripped up and fell. I stood over him, doubtful whether he were dead. Just then the door of the laboratory opened. The boys began to scatter, shouting to one another, "The Creature! Here he comes. The Creature!" The Bantam picked himself up and followed the crowd.

A man came round the side of the shed. He looked something like Dot-and-Carry-One, only he was smaller. His hair was the color of a badger's, shaggy and unbrushed. His face was stubbly and besmirched with different colored chalks from his fingers. His clothes were stained and baggy. He approached sideways, crabwise, in a great hurry, with one hand stretched out behind and one in front, like flappers. His gestures were those of a servant in a Chinese etching; they made him absurdly conspicuous by their self-belittlement. Beyond everything, he was dirty.

"What they been beating you for?" he inquired in his shorthand way of talking. "You hit him first! What for?" He pulled a stump of a pencil out of his mouth as though he were drawing a tooth. After that I could hear him more clearly. "A muffler? He trod on it? Well, that's nothing to fight about. Oh, your sister gave it you? That's different."

The last two sentences were spoken very gently—quite unlike the rest, which had been angry. "Humph! His sister gave it him!"

He took me by the hand and led me into the shed, closing the door behind him. An iron stove was burning. The outside was red hot; it glowered through the dusk. Running round the sides of the room were taps and basins, and above them bottles. Ranged on the table in the middle were stands, bunsen-burners and retorts. He went silently about his work. He was melting sulphur in a crucible.

Every now and then the sulphur caught and burnt with a violet flame; and all the while it made a suffocating smell.

I felt scared. I didn't know what he was going to do with me. The boys had called him The Creature, which sounded very dreadful. He had dragged me into his den just like the ogres the Snow Lady read about.

Presently his experiment ended. He gave me a seat by the stove, and came and sat beside me. He didn't look at all fierce now. He struck me as old and discouraged.

"Always fight for your sister," he said. Then after a pause, "What's she called?"

I found myself telling him that she wasn't really my sister, that her name was Ruthita, and that she had knitted me the muffler. He patted me on the knee as I talked. He might almost have been The Spuffler.

"Boys are horrid beasts," he said. "They don't mean to be unkind. They don't think—that's all. Soon you'll be one of them."

He led the way out of the laboratory, turning the key behind him. The bell in the tower was ringing for supper. The school was all lit up. He climbed the railing which divided the playground from the football field, telling me to follow. We passed across the meadows to the village, which lay on the northward side of Eden Hill; it snuggled among trees. The cottages were straw-thatched. Frost glistened on the window-panes, behind which lamps were set. Unmelted snow glimmered here and there in the gardens in patches among cabbage stumps. We turned in at a gate. The Creature raised the latch of the door and we entered.

How cozy the little house was after the bare stone corridors and cold, boarded dormitories. All the furnishings of the room into which he led me were worn and out-of-date; but they had a homelike look about them which atoned for their shabbiness. The walls bulged. Pictures hung awry upon them. The springs of the sofa had burst; you sank to an unexpected depth when you sat upon it. The carpet was threadbare; patch-work rugs covered the worst

places. Yet for all its poverty, you knew that it was a room in which people had loved and been kind to one another. An atmosphere of memory hung about it.

The Creature appeared to be his own house-keeper. He left me alone while he went somewhere into the back to get things ready. I could hear him striking matches and jingling cups against saucers.

As I sat looking curiously round at wax-fruit in glass-cases and a stuffed owl on the mantel-shelf, the door was pushed open gently. An old lady entered. She trod so lightly, gliding her feet along the floor, that I should not have heard her save for the turning of the handle. She was dressed from head to foot in clinging muslin. Her face and hands were so frail and white that you could almost see through them. Her faded hair fell disordered and scanty about her shoulders. Her eyes were unnaturally large and luminous. She showed no surprise at seeing me. She looked at me so stealthily that she seemed to establish a secret. Crossing her hands on her breast she courtesied, and then asked me as odd a question as was ever addressed to a little boy. "Are you my Lord?"

"If you please, mam," I faltered, "I'm Dante Card-over."

Her look of intense eagerness faded, and one of almost childish disappointment took its place. She moved slowly about the room, from corner to corner, bowing to people whom I could not see and whispering to herself.

My host came shuffling along the passage. He was carrying a tea-tray. When he saw the woman, he set it hurriedly down on the table and went quietly towards her. "Gipie," he said, "Egypt, we're not alone; we have a guest. Tell them to go away."

He spoke to her soothingly, as though she were a child. Her eyes narrowed, the strained far-away expression left her face. She made a motion with her hand, dismissing the invisible persons. He led her to me. It was strange to see a grown woman follow so obediently.

"Gipie," he said, "I want you to listen to me. This

boy is my friend. They were fighting him up there," jerking his head in the direction of the school. "He's lonely; so I brought him to you. Tell him that you care."

The old lady lifted her hands to my shoulders—such pale hands. "I'm sorry," she said. It was like a child repeating a lesson.

He introduced us. "This is my sister, Egypt; and this is Dante Cardover."

I don't know what we talked about. I can only remember that the little old man and woman were kind to me and gave me courage. There are desolate moments in life when one hour of sympathy calls out more gratitude than years of easy friendship.

That night as the Creature walked back with me from his cottage, he told me to come to him whenever I was lonely. At the Red House he explained my absence to the house-master. I went upstairs to the dormitory, with its rows of twelve white beds down either side, feeling that I had parted from a friend.

As I undressed in the darkness the Bantam spoke to me. "Didn't mean to fight you, Cardover. Make it up."

So I made it up that night with the boy whose nose I had punched. He was a decent little chap when off his dignity. We began to make confidences in whispers; I suppose the darkness helped us. He told me that his father was in India and that he hadn't got a mother. I told him about the Snow Lady, and Hetty, and Uncle Obad; I didn't tell him about Ruthita because of the muffler. Then I began to ask him about the Creature. I wanted to know if that was his name. The Bantam laughed. "Course not. He's Murdoch the stinks' master. We call him the Creature 'cause he looks like one. Weren't you funky when he took you to his rabbit-hutch? Was Lady Zion there?"

"Lady Zion?"

"Yes. Lady Zion Holy Ghost she calls herself. She's his sister, and she's balmy."

He was going to enter into some interesting details about her, when the monitor and the elder boys came up. He hid

his face in the pillow and pretended to be sleeping soundly.

"The Bantam needs hair-brushing," the monitor announced. "Here you, wake up. You're shamming." He pulled the clothes off the Bantam's bed with one jerk. The Bantam sat up, rubbing his eyes with a good imitation of having just awakened.

"Out you come."

One boy held his hands and another his legs, bending his body into a praying attitude. He fought like a demon, but to no purpose. They yanked his night-shirt up, while the monitor laid into him with the bristly side of a hair-brush. He addressed him between each blow. "That's one for bullying a new-bug. And that's another for fighting. And that's another for being licked and getting in a funk, etc." By the time they had done he was sobbing bitterly. Then the light went out.

I suppose I ought to have been glad at being avenged; but I wasn't. Somehow I felt that the big boys had punished him not from a sense of justice, but only because they were big and wanted to amuse themselves. Then I got to thinking what a long way off India was, and how dreadful it must make a boy feel never to see his father. It had been a long while dark in the dormitory and almost everyone was breathing heavily. I stretched out my hand across the narrow alley which separated me from the Bantam.

"Bantam," I whispered.

He snuffled.

"Bantam."

I felt his fingers clutch my hand. I crept out and put my arms about him. Then I got into his bed and curled up beside him, and so we both were comforted.

CHAPTER III

THE WORLD OF BOYS

THE Bantam and I became great friends. He was a brave dare-devil little chap, prematurely hardened by the absence of home influences to make the best of life's vicissitudes. Within an hour of having been beaten, he would be gay again as ever. He was a soldier's son, and never wasted time in pitying himself. He was greedy for joy, as I am to this day, and we contrived to find it together.

Yet, when I look back, the making of happiness at the Red House seems to me to have been very much like manufacturing bricks without straw. I am amazed at our success. Very slight provision was made for our comfort. Our daily routine was in no way superior to that of a barrack; the only difference was that they drilled our heads instead of our arms and legs. The feminine influence was entirely lacking, and a good deal of brutality resulted. If the parents could have guessed half the shocking things that their fresh-faced innocent looking darlings did and said in the three months of each term that they were away from home, they would have been broken-hearted. And yet they might have guessed. For here were we, young animals in every stage of adolescence, herded together in class-rooms and dormitories, uninformed about ourselves, with only paid people to care for us.

Apart from the masters we governed ourselves by a secret code of honor. One of the favorite diversions, when things were dull, was to find some boy who was unpopular, in a breach of schoolboy etiquette. He would then be led into a class-room, held down over a desk, and thrashed with hockey-sticks. I have seen a boy receive as many as

ninety strokes, laid on by various young barbarians who took a pride in seeing who could hit hardest. Usually at the end of it the victim was nearly fainting, and would be lame for days after. The masters knew all about such proceedings, but they were too indifferent to interfere. They boasted that they trusted to the school's sense of justice.

A boy, who was at all sensitive, went about in a state of terror. If you escaped hockey-sticks by day, there was always the dormitory and hair-brush to be dreaded. The way to get beyond the dread of such possibilities was to make yourself popular, and the easiest way to become popular was to play ingenious pranks on the masters.

The glorious hours of liberty that broke up the monotonous round of tasks stand out in vivid contrast to the discipline. We lived for them and kept charts of the days, because this seemed to bring them nearer. There were two half-holidays a week, Wednesdays and Saturdays, on which, if sufficient excuse were given, we were allowed to go out of the school-grounds. If the permission were withheld, we broke bounds and took the risk of discovery and consequent thrashings. These stolen expeditions had a zest about them that made them the more pleasurable.

The Bantam and I did most things together. We had a common fund of money. His memories of India lent a touch of romance to our friendship. He would spin long yarns of man-eating tigers and terrible battles with hill-tribes. He had a lurid imagination and added some fresh detail each time he told his tales. Not to be behindhand, I narrated my escape to the forest—leaving out the Ruthitha part of it—and how Lilith had made me a gipsy.

These stories became a secret between us which we shared with no one. We created for ourselves a mirage world which we called IT. In IT we had only to speak of things and they happened. In IT there were man-eating tigers to whom we threw our masters when they had been unpleasant to us. We would drag them by their feet through the jungle, and then let out a low blood-thirsty

wailing sound. Immediately we had done it, we would drop our victim and climb trees, for we could hear the tigers coming. The victim was bound so he couldn't run away and while he lay there "in the long rank grass with bulging eyes," we would remind him of his crimes committed at the Red House. The account of his tortures and dying words would become a dialogue between the Bantam and myself.

"Then the tiger seized him by the arm and chawed him," the Bantam would say.

"And the other tiger seized him by the leg, pulling in an opposite direction," said I.

"Then old Sneard looked up at me, with imploring eyes. 'I've been a beast,' he moaned, 'and you were always a good boy. Call them off for the sake of my little girl.' But I only laughed sepulchrally," said the Bantam.

"Your little girl will be jolly well glad when you're dead," said I.

"Everybody will be glad," said the Bantam. "And then a third tiger crept out of the bushes and bit off his head, putting an end to his agony."

"You needn't have killed him so soon," I would expostulate discontentedly. "I'd got something else I wanted to do to him."

"All right," the Bantam would assent cheerfully; "let's kill him again."

So real was this land of IT to us, that we would shout with excitement as we reached the climax of our narrations. The English fields through which we wandered became swamps, deserts, and forests at will.

It became part of our game to pretend that we might meet Lilith any day. Often we would break bounds, stealing down country lanes and peering through hedges, hoping that at the next turn we should discover her seated before her camp-fire. Hope deferred never curbed our eagerness; we always believed that we should meet her next time.

If we did not meet Lilith, we met someone equally strange—Lady Zion, the Creature's sister. It was the Ban-

tam who told me all about her. "She's wrong up there," he said, tapping his forehead. "She thinks she's something out of the Bible; that's why she calls herself Lady Zion Holy Ghost. She goes about the country dressed in white, riding on a donkey, muttering to herself, looking for someone she can never find. She thinks that she's in love with old Sneard, and that he don't care for her. They say that once he was going to marry her and then threw her over. That's what sent her balmy."

When I grew older I learnt the truth about the Creature and his sister. He became a firm friend of mine before schooldays were ended. He was a man who possessed a faculty for not getting on in the world which, had it been of value, would have amounted to genius. Anyone else with his brains and instinct for daring guess-work in scientific experiment, would have made a reputation. Instead of which he potted his life out at the Red House, defending his sister and allowing himself to be imposed on both by boys and masters.

Popularity was the armor which permitted you to do almost anything with impunity. A boy would take almost any chance to get it. Very early in my school experience the Bantam thought out a plan which he invited me to share—with the dire result that I was brought into intimate contact with Mr. Sneard.

Every night between seven and eight the lower forms assembled to prepare their next day's lessons. The Creature usually presided, chiefly because he was good-natured and the other masters were lazy. It was part of his penance. The room in which we assembled was illumined by oil-lamps, which hung low on chains from the ceiling. If the chimney of one of these broke, the light became so bad in that quarter that work was suspended until it had been replaced. The Bantam conceived the happy idea of persuading them to break in an almost undiscoverable manner. It was simplicity itself—to spit across the room so skilfully as to hit the chimney, whereupon the moisture on the hot glass would cause it to crack. We practised at

sticks and gate-posts in the fields at first; having become more or less proficient, we practised aiming at objects above our heads. This was more difficult. Our progress was slow; it was dry work. Still, within a month we considered ourselves adepts.

One night in prep we put our plan to the test. The Creature was seated at his raised desk, absorbed in some scientific work. The Bantam, judging his distance carefully, took aim and the chimney cracked. As soon as the lamp-boy had been sent for and the chimney had been replaced, it was my turn. I was no less successful. For a week prep was disorganized; every night the same thing happened. I felt secretly ashamed of myself, for I knew that I was behaving meanly to a man who had always been kind in his dealings with me; but I was intoxicated with popularity. The Bantam and I were the heroes of the hour. Boys who had never condescended to speak to us, now offered us their next week's pocket-money to instruct them in an art in which we excelled. Games were abandoned. All over the play-ground groups of young ruffians might be seen industriously spitting at some object by the hour together.

I suppose the Creature must have watched us from the laboratory and put two and two together. One night, when three chimneys had broken in succession, he caught me in mid-act. I say he caught me, but he did not so much as look up from the book he was reading. He just said, without raising his head, "Cardover, you must report yourself to Mr. Sneard to-morrow."

To have to report oneself to Mr. Sneard was the worst punishment that an under-master could measure out. Somehow it had never entered my head that the Creature would be so severe as that. Why, I might get expelled or publicly thrashed! My imagination conjured up all sorts of disgraces and grisly penalties.

That night in the dormitory the Bantam told me of a way in which I might save myself; it was my first lesson in the value of diplomacy in helping one out of ticklish sit-

uations. It appeared that Mr. Sneard was always lenient with a boy who professed conversion.

Next day as I was hesitating outside his private room, screwing up my courage to tap, the Bantam sidled up behind me. "I'm going too," he said. Before I could dissuade him, he had turned the handle.

Sneard was a sallow cadaverous person; he affected side-whiskers and had red hair. He wore clerical attire, the vest of which was very much spotted through his near-sightedness when he ate at table. He was probably the least scholarly master in the school, but he owed his position to his manners. They were unctuous, and had the reputation of going down with the parents. I suppose that was how he caught my father. He composed hymns, which he set to music and compelled us to sing on Sundays. They were mostly of the self-abasement order, in which we spoke of ourselves as worms and besought the Almighty not to tread on us. For years my mental picture of God was that of a gigantic school-master in holy orders, very similar in appearance to Sneard himself.

When we entered, he was seated behind his desk writing. He prolonged our suspense by pretending not to see us for a while. Suddenly he cast aside his pen and wheeled round in a storm of furious anger. When he spoke, it sounded like a dog yapping.

"You young blackguards, what's this I hear about you?"

He forced us to tell him the stupid details of our offense. He could have had no sense of humor, for while we were speaking he covered his eyes with his hand as though staggered with horror at the enormity of our depravity. Later experience has taught me that what he meant us to believe was that he was engaged in prayer.

When in small throaty whispers we had finished our confession, he looked up at us. "Your poor, poor fathers," he said, "one in India and one my friend! What shall I tell them? How shall I break this news to them?"

Then he straightened himself in his chair. "There's

nothing else for it; Cardover, it's over there. Will you please fetch it?"

He pointed to a cane in the corner, which leant against a book-shelf. It was at this crisis that the Bantam made use of his stratagem.

"If you please, sir, I've been troubled about my soul again." Then he added loyally, "And Cardover's been lying awake of nights thinking about hell."

If the truth be told I had been lying awake imagining Sneard being bled to death very slowly, and very torturingly, by a hill-tribe. But Sneard caught at the bait. "I am glad to hear it. Cardover, before I cane you, come here and tell me about your views on hell."

Before we left him, great crocodile tears were streaming from our eyes by reason of knuckles rubbed in vigorously. We were not punished. The last sight I had of Sneard he was gazing with holy joy at a great oil-painting of himself which hung above his desk.

Most of the boys in the Red House were converted many times—as often as they came within reach of the birch. Sneard made much coin out of referring to these touching spiritual experiences in public gatherings of parents. I have never been able to decide whether we really did fool him. I am inclined to believe that his eyes were wide open to our hypocrisy, but that he found it paid to encourage it. Part of his salary was derived from percentages on the tuition fees of all boys over a certain number. He found that the best card to play with parents for the attracting of new pupils, was a statement of the numerous conversions which were brought about through his influence.

CHAPTER IV

NEW HORIZONS

THE Bantam and I won immunity from bullying in a quite unexpected manner.

Our beds stood next together. Every night the younger boys were sent up to the dormitory at nine; fifteen minutes later the lights were turned out. The upper-classmen didn't come up till ten. For three-quarters of an hour each night we could whisper together in comparative privacy about IT, going on wildest excursions in our hidden land. Not unnaturally the curiosity of the other small boys of our dormitory was aroused—they wanted to share our secret, and we wouldn't let them. We were quite their match if it came to a fight, which was all the more irritating. We steadily refused to fight with them, or play with them, or to tell them anything. They became sulky and suspicious; in their opinion our conversation was too low to bear repetition. I suppose one of them must have sneaked to Cow—Cow was monitor of our dormitory. One night he came up early and on tiptoe. The first thing I knew he was standing in the darkness looking down on me, where I lay whispering on the Bantam's bed. I was fairly caught.

"Young 'un, what's that you're saying?" he asked sternly.

To have told him would have spoiled everything. Only when my night-shirt had been stripped off and I saw that a grand gala-night of hair-brushing was being planned, did I venture an explanation.

"I was only telling the Bantam a story."

"That's a lie. Let's hear it," said the Cow.

"I can't begin when you've got my shirt," I expostulated. "Let me get back into bed; then I'll tell you."

It was arranged that I should be given a respite while the older boys undressed. Once safe in bed, I set my imagination galloping.

"Once upon a time," I commenced, "there was a great pirate and he was known as the Pirate King. He had a wife called One-Eye, and she was the only person he was afraid of in all the world. He sailed the blood-red seas with a crew of smugglers and highwaymen, most of whom he had rescued at the last minute from the gallows. They were devoted to him, and the vessel in which he sailed was called *The Damn*."

The name of the vessel fetched them. There was no more talk of hair-brushing. At half-past ten the light went out and we heard old Sneard shuffling down the passage, going his final round of inspection. At each door he halted, lifting his candle above his head and craning out his long thin neck. Satisfied that all was in order, he shuffled on to his own quarters and we heard his door slam. That night I must have lain in the darkness recounting the adventures of the Pirate King till long past twelve. Every now and then a voice would interrupt me from one of the narrow white beds, asking a question. I fell asleep in the midst of my recounting.

After that it became a practice that each night a fresh development in the life of this wonderful man should be unfolded. It was a good deal of a tax on the imagination, but the Bantam came to my help, and we told the story turn and turn about. We told how *The Damn* sailed into Peru and came back blood-drenched and treasure-laden; how the Pirate King took strange maidens to his breast in coloring all the way from alabaster to ebony, and what his wife One-Eye had to say about it; how the Pirate King could never be defeated and became so strong that he made himself Pope till he got tired of it. Discrepancies in chronology caused us no more inconvenience than they usually do historic novelists. In our world Joan of Arc and Julius Cæsar were contemporaries. They met for the first time as prisoners, when they were introduced by the

Pirate King on board *The Damn*. It was owing to the Roman Emperor that the Maid escaped and survived to be burnt.

But the part which found most favor was that which described the sack of London, and how the boys of the Red House enlisted with the pirates and took all the masters, except the Creature, out to sea and made them walk the plank. I refused to allow the Creature to be murdered.

When the story became personal, the Bantam and I discovered ourselves the possessors of unlimited power. We were lords of the other boys' destinies. We could make them heroes or cowards, give them fair maidens or forget to say anything about them. Frequently we received bribes to let the giver down easily or to make him appear more valiant. I'm afraid we drifted into being tyrants, like Nero and all the other men whose wills have been absolute, and took our revenge with the rod of imagination. In the middle of some thrilling escapade of the pirates, when only courage could save them from calamity, we would tell how one of the boys in a near-by bed turned traitor and went over to the enemy.

Out of the darkness would come an angry voice, "I didn't, you little beasts. You know quite well, I didn't."

"Oh, yes, you did," we would say, and proceed to make him appear yet more infamous. If he expostulated too frequently, arms would be reached out and a shower of boots would fly about his head.

Our reputation spread beyond the dormitory; the history of the Pirate King, his wife One-Eye, and the good ship *Damn*, became a kind of school epic in which all the latest happenings at the Red House were chronicled. No one dared to offend us, small as we were. Like Benvenuto Cellini, sniffing his way through Europe and petulantly turning his back on kings and cardinals with impunity, we attained the successful genius's privilege of being detested for our persons, but treasured for our accomplishments. So at last we were popular in a fashion.

What contrasts of experience we had in those days!

The crestfallen returns to the Red House, with play-boxes stuffed with feeble comfort in the shape of chocolates and cake; the long monotony of term-time with the dull lessons, the birchings, the flashes of excitement on half-holidays and the counting of the weeks till vacations came round; then the wild burst of enthusiasm when trunks were packed and Sneard had offered up his customary prayer in his accustomed language, and we set off shouting on the homeward journey.

All the discipline and captivity were a small price to pay for the gladness of those home-comings. Ruthita would be at the end of the Lane waiting for me, a little shy at first but undeniably happy. The Snow Lady would be on the door-step, her pretty face all aglow with merriment. My father would forsake his study for the night and sit down to talk to me with all the leisure and courtesy that he usually reserved for grown men. Until they got used to me again I could upset my tea at table, slide down the banisters, and tramp through the house with muddy boots—no one rebuked me for fear the welcome should be spoiled. The Snow Lady called me The Fatted Calf, wilfully misinterpreting the Bible parable. Little by little Ruthita would lose her shyness; then we would begin to plan all the things we would do in the seemingly inexhaustible period of freedom that lay before us. In those days weeks were as long as years are now.

There was once a time when I had no secrets from Ruthita. But a change was creeping over us almost imperceptibly, forming little rifts of reserve which widened. Walls of a new and more subtle kind were growing up about us, dividing us for a time from one another and from everybody else.

There was one holiday in which I became friendly with a butcher-boy. He was a guinea-pig fancier; I arranged to buy one from him for a shilling. My intention was to give it to Ruthita on her birthday. I told no one of my plan—it was to be a surprise. A little hutch was knocked up in the tool-shed which the old white hen had tenanted.

The night before the birthday the butcher-boy came, and smuggled the little creature in at the gate. Next morning I wakened early. Ruthita was standing beside my bed in her long white night-gown, beneath which her rosy toes peeped out. When I had kissed her, she seemed surprised that I had no present for her. I became mysterious. "You wait until I'm dressed," I said.

Slipping into my clothes I ran into the garden to get things ready. To my unspeakable astonishment when I looked into the hutch, I found three guinea-pigs, two of them very tiny, where only one had been the night before. I felt that something shameful and indelicate had happened. Exactly what I could not say, but something that I could not tell Ruthita. When she traced me down to the tool-shed, I drove her away almost angrily; I felt that I was secretly disgraced.

That morning when the butcher-boy called for orders, I took him aside. I sold him back the three guinea-pigs for ninepence, and thought the loss of threepence a cheap price to pay to rid myself of such embarrassment. The butcher-boy grinned broadly and winked in a knowing manner. To me it was all very serious, and with a boy's pride I did not invite enlightenment. I took Ruthita out and let her choose her own present up to the value of ninepence. I lied to her, saying that that was what I had intended.

Arguing by analogy from this experience, I gradually came to realize that all about me was a world of passion, the first boundaries of which I was just beginning to traverse.

The Bantam, having no home to go to, would sometimes return with me to Pope Lane for the vacation; the Snow Lady was attracted by his freckled face and impudently upturned nose. In the early years he, Ruthita, and I would play together. Then, as we grew more boyish, we would play games in which she could not share. But at last a time came when I found that it was I who was excluded.

I found that Ruthita and the Bantam had a way of going off and hiding themselves. It was quite evident that they

had secrets which they kept from me. An understanding lay between them in which I could not share. I became irritable and began to watch.

One summer evening after tea I could not find them. The gate into the Lane was unlatched; I followed. There was a deserted house no great way distant, standing shuttered in the midst of overgrown grounds. We had found a bar broken in the railings, and there the Bantam and I played highwaymen. Naturally I thought of this haunt first.

Creeping through the long grass I came upon them. The Bantam had his arm about Ruthita's waist. She was tossing back her hair; her face was radiant. I could only catch a glimpse of her sideways, but it came home to me that the qualities in her which, in my blindness, I had taken for granted, were beautiful and rare. As I watched, the Bantam kissed her. She drew back her head, glad and yet ashamed. I crept away with a strange sense of forlornness in my heart; they had stumbled across a pleasure of which I was ignorant.

Poor little Ruthita!—it was short-lived. Hetty, having quarreled with the gardener, had not married. What I had seen, she also saw a few days later and told my father. He was very angry. I can see Ruthita now, with her long spindly legs and short skirts, standing up demurely to take her scolding. I listened to the scorching words my father spoke to her; the burden of his talk was that her conduct was unladylike. I came to her defense with the remark, "But, father, she only did what I saw you and the Snow Lady doing."

That night I went to bed supperless and I had no more pocket-money for a week. The Bantam's visit was cut short; he was bundled back to the Red House. I was sent down to Ransby to stay with my Grandmother Cardover. I have the fixed remembrance of Ruthita's eyes very red with weeping. The utmost comfort I could give her was the promise that I would carry messages of her eternal faithfulness to her lover on my return to school.

The world had grown very complicated. Love was either wicked or stupid. Hetty had acted as though it was wicked when I caught her with John ; my father, when I had caught him, as though it was stupid. Yet he was not ashamed of love now that he was married. I could not see why Ruthita should be so scolded for doing what her mother did every day.

CHAPTER V

THE AWAKENING

At a distance I had been sorry for the Bantam, but at close quarters his hopeless passion for Ruthita bored me. On my return to the Red House he overwhelmed me with a flood of maudlin confessions. There was nothing pleased him better than to get me alone, so that he could outline to me his impossible plans for an early marriage. He talked of running away to sea and making his fortune in a distant land. It sounded all very easy. His only fear was that in his long absence Ruthita might be forced to marry some other fellow. "Dante," he would say, "you're a lucky chap to have been always near her."

This kind of talk irritated me, partly because I was jealous of an ecstasy which I could not understand, and partly because I had known Ruthita so many years that I thought I knew her exact value a good deal better than the Bantam. There was something very absurd, too, in the contrast between this gawky boy, with his downy face and clumsy hands, and these exaggerated expressions of sentiment. I began to avoid him; at that time I did not know why, but now I know it was because of the herd spirit which shuns abnormality.

Nevertheless he had stirred something latent within me. My days became haunted with alluring conjectures; beneath the cold formality of human faces and manners I caught glimpses of a boisterous ruffianly passion. Sometimes it would repel me, making me unspeakably sad; but more often it swept me away in a torrent of inexplicable riotous happiness. I had come to an age when, shut him up as you may in the garden of unenlightenment, a boy

must hear from beyond the walls the pagan pipes and the dancing feet of Pan.

Of nights I would lie awake, still and tense, reasoning my way forward and forward, out of the fairy tales of childhood into reality. Sometimes I would bury my face in my pillow, half glad and half ashamed of my strange, new knowledge. Now all the glory of the flesh in the Classics, which before had slipped by me when encountered as a schoolboy's task, burned in my brain with the vehement fire of immemorial romance.

Old Sneard had a terrifying sermon, which he was fond of preaching on Sunday evenings when the chapel was full of shadows. His heated face, startlingly illumined by the pulpit-lamps, would take on the furious earnestness of an accusing angel as he leant out towards us describing the spiritual tortures of the damned. He spoke in symbolic language of the causes which led up to damnation. Until quite lately I had wondered what in the world he could be driving at. His text was, "Son of man, hast thou seen what the elders of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in his chambers of imagery?" The grotesque unreality of likening a group of school-boys to the elders of Israel never occurred to me; I was too carried away by the reality of sin itself and the terror of what was said. When service was ended I would steal up the stone stairway to the dormitory in silence, almost fearful that my guilt might be betrayed by my shadow. . . .

It was summer-time. Those of us who professed an interest in entomology were permitted during the hour between prep and supper to rove the country with butterfly-nets. The results of these expeditions were given to the school natural history museum; most of the boys hunted in pairs. Things being as they were between myself and the Bantam, I preferred to go by myself.

All day it had been raining. The sky was still damp with heavy clouds and the evening fell early. I slipped out into the cool wet dusk, eager to be solitary. Some boys were kicking a ball and called to me to come and play

with them. In my anxiety not to be delayed, I doubled up my fists and ran. They followed in pursuit, but soon their shouts and laughter grew fainter, till presently I was alone in a dim, green world. The air was exquisitely fragrant with earth and flower smells. Far away between the trees of Eden Hill a watery sunset faded palely. Nearer at hand dog-roses and convolvuli glimmered in the hedges.

I threw myself down in the dripping grass, lying full-length on my back, so that I could watch the stars struggle out between the edges of clouds. Oh, the sense of freedom and wideness, and the sheer joy of being at large in the world! I listened to the stillness of the twilight, which is a stillness made up of an infinity of tiny sounds—birds settling into their nests, trees whispering together, and flowers drawing closer their fragile petals to shut out the cold night air. I told myself that all the little creatures of the fields and hedgerows were tucking one another safe in bed. Then, as if to contradict me, the sudden passion of the nightingale wandered down the stairway of the silence, each note separately poignant, like glances of a lover who halts and looks back from every step as he descends. From far away the passion was answered, and again it was returned.

A great White Admiral fluttered over my head. I picked up my net and was after it. So, in a second, the boy within me proved himself stronger than the man. But the butterfly refused to let me get near it and would never settle long enough for me to catch it.

I followed from field to field, till at last it came to the cricket-ground and made a final desperate effort to escape me by flying over the hedge into the private garden of Sneard's house. His garden was forbidden territory, but the twilight made me bold to forget that. Breaking through the hedge I followed, running tiptoe down a path which ended in a summer-house. The White Admiral settled on a rosebush; I was in the act of netting it when I heard someone stirring. Standing in the doorway of the summer-

house was a girl about as tall as myself. We eyed one another through the dusk in silence. Her face was indistinct and in shadow.

"You don't know how you frightened me."

Directly she spoke I knew that she was not Beatrice Sneed, as I had dreaded. Her voice was too friendly; it had in it the lazy caressing quality of a summer's afternoon when bees are humming in and out of flowers. Her way of pronouncing words was halting and slightly foreign. In after years I came to know just how much power of temptation her voice possessed.

"I suppose you're not allowed in here," she said; "but you needn't worry—I shan't tell."

The boy in me prompted me to answer, "You can tell if you care to."

She gave a secret little laugh. "But I shan't."

After all my gallant imaginings of what I would do on a like occasion, I stood before her awkwardly, tongue-tied and ungracious—so far removed are dreams from reality. The White Admiral, tired with the long pursuit, still clung to the rose's petals. Across misty fields nightingales called, casting the love-spell, and the moon, in intermittent flashes, caused the dripping foliage to glisten.

She rested her hand on my arm—such a small white hand—and drew me into the seclusion of the summer-house.

"You're not afraid of girls, are you?" she questioned, and then inconsequently, "I'm awfully lonely."

There was a note of appeal in her tones, so I found my tongue and asked why she was lonely.

"Because I quarrel with Beatrice—we don't get on together. Do you know, she thinks all you boys are simply horrid persons?"

"Perhaps we are," I said. "Most people think that."

"But I don't," she answered promptly.

Gradually my constraint left me. She had an easy kindness and assurance in her manner that I had never found in any other girl. She slipped her hand into mine; made

bold by the darkness of the summer-house, I held it tightly.

"I like you. I like you very much," she whispered.

"But you've never spoken to me before. Why should you like me?"

She turned her face to mine, so that our lips were quite near together. "I suppose because I'm a girl."

The bell for supper began to ring. I pretended not to hear it. Through the roses across the lawn I saw Sneard stand in his study-window, struggling into his gown. Then the window became dark and I knew that he had gone to read evening prayers.

"The bell is ringing," she said at last. "If you don't go, you'll get punished."

"If it's for your sake, I don't care."

She pushed me gently from her. "Go away now. If you get into trouble, you'll not be able to come back to-morrow."

She ran down the path with me as far as the hedge. The bell was at its last strokes, swinging slower and slower. At the hedge we halted. I knew what I wanted to do; my whole body ached to take her in my arms and kiss her. But something stronger than will—the habit of restraint—prevented. Some paces away on the other side of the hedge I remembered that I did not even know her name. Without halting I called back to her questioning, and as I ran the answer followed me through the shadows,

"Fiesole."

After the monitors had come up and the lights had been put out, I waited for an hour till all the dormitory was sleeping; then, very stealthily, I edged myself out of bed. Standing upright, I listened to make sure that I was undetected. I stole out into the corridor bare-foot. I feared to dress lest anyone should be aroused. In my long linen night-gown I tiptoed down the corridor, down the stairs, and entered the fifth-form class-room. Throwing up the window I climbed out.

An English summer's night lay before me in all its silver

splendor—huge shadows of trees, scented coolness of the air, and damp smoothness of turf beneath my tread. The exultation of life's bigness and cleanness came upon me. I knew now that it was right to be proud of the body and to love the body. Oh, why had it been left to a glimpse in the dusk of a young girl's face to teach me that? At a rush I had become possessed of all the codes of mediæval chivalry. Every woman, however old or unpleasing, was for Fiesole's sake most perfect—a person to be worshiped; for in serving her I should be serving Fiesole. What a name to have! How all her perfectness was summed up in the beauty of those full vowel sounds, *Fi-es-sol-le*.

I trespassed again in the garden. In the quiet of the rose-scented night I entered the summer-house.

Far away the nightingales sang on. There were words to their chanting now and their song was no longer melancholy. And these were the words as I heard them: "*Fiesole—Fiesole—Fiesole. Love in the world. Love in the world. Glad—glad—glad.*"

CHAPTER VI

WHAT IS LOVE?

My secret was too big and beautiful to keep to myself. There was no one I could tell it to save the Bantam. But the Bantam had grown shy of me; he knew that within myself I had been laughing at him. He turned away when I tried to catch his eye, and bent with unaccustomed diligence above his lessons.

Not till after lunch did I get a chance to approach him. All the other boys had changed into flannels and had hurried off to the cricket-nets. I wandered into the empty playground and there found him seated alone in a corner. His knees were drawn up so that his chin rested on them; in his eyes was a far-away sorrowful expression. I halted before him.

"Bantam."

He did not look up, but I knew by the twitching of his hands that he had heard.

"Bantam, I've got something to tell you."

Slowly he turned his head. He was acting the part of Hamlet and I was vastly impressed. "Is it about Ruthita?"

"Partly. But it's happened to me too, Bantam."

"Wot?"

"A girl."

A genuine look of live-boy astonishment overspread his countenance. "A girl!" he ejaculated. "But there ar'n't any about—unless you mean Pigtails."

Pigtails was Beatrice Sneard, and I felt that an insult was being leveled at me.

"If you say that again, I'll punch your head."

"Oh, so it is Pigtails." He rose to his feet lazily and began to take off his jacket. "Come on and punch it."

But a fight wasn't at all what I wanted. So I walked straight up to him with my hands held down.

"Silly ass, how could it be Pigtails? Do I look that sort? It's another girl. I came to you 'cause you're in love, and you'll understand. I've been a beast to you—won't you be friends?"

I held out my hand and he took it with surly defiance. I was too eager for sympathy, however, to be discouraged.

"She's called Fiesole," I said. "Isn't that beautiful?"

"Ruthita's better."

"She's got gold hair with just a little—a little red in it."

"I prefer black."

"I'm not talking about Ruthita; I'm telling you about Fiesole."

"I know that," said the Bantam; "you never do talk about Ruthita now."

I walked away from him angrily in the direction I had taken on the previous evening. As I approached the nets I saw a little group of spectators. Then I made out the clerical figure of Sneard and the figure of Pigtails dressed in gray, and between them a slim white girl. Behind me I heard the pit-a-pat of running feet on the turf. The Bantam flung his arm about my shoulders, saying, "I've been a beast and you've been a beast; but we won't be beasts any longer." Then, following the direction of my eyes, "What are you staring at? Is that her? My eye, she's a topper!"

He prodded me to go forward. When I showed reluctance, he used almost Fiesole's words, "Why, surely, Dante, you ar'n't afraid of a girl!"

I was afraid, and always have been wherever my affections are concerned. But I wasn't going to own it just then. I let him slip his arm through mine, and we sauntered forward together. Through the soft summer air came the sharp *click* of the ball as it glanced off the bat,

and the long cheer which followed as the wicket went down. Fiesole turned, clapping her hands, and our eyes met. Then she ceased to look at me; her gaze rested on the Bantam, while a half-smile played about her mouth. A pang of jealousy shot through me. With the instinctive egotism of the male, I felt that by the mere fact of loving her I had made her my property. However, Pigtails came to my rescue, for I saw her jolt Fiesole with her elbow; her shocked voice reached me, saying, "Cousin Fiesole, whatever are you staring at?"

I tugged at the Bantam's sleeve and we turned away.

"My golly, but she is a ripper," he whispered.

As the distance grew between us and her, he kept glancing across his shoulder and once halted completely to gaze back. I envied him his effrontery. My fate from the beginning has been to run away from the women I love—and then to regret it.

We had entered into another field and were passing a laburnum tree, when the Bantam drew up sharply. He pointed to its blossom all gold and yellow. "The color of her hair," he said, and promptly threw himself under it, lying on his back, gazing up at its burning foliage. The sun filtered down through its leaves upon us, making fantastic patterns on our hands and faces. The field was tall in hay, ready for the cutting, so we had the boy's delight of being completely hidden from the world.

"What's the color of her eyes?" he asked presently.

"Don't know; it was dusk when I saw her. I expect it's the same as Ruthita's."

"Who is she?"

"Met her in Sneard's garden—Pigtails called her 'cousin' just now."

"She's called Fiesole! Pretty name. How it suits her."

"Not prettier than Ruthita," I said.

He sat up and grinned at me. "Who're you getting at? You wanted me to say all that half-an-hour ago in the playground; now I've said it. I can think she's pretty, can't I, and still love Ruthita best?"

"But you oughtn't to love her at all," I expostulated with a growing sense of indignant proprietorship.

"Look here," explained the Bantam seriously, "you're jealous. That's the way I felt about you when you told me that you weren't Ruthita's brother; I quite understand. But if I'm to marry Ruthita, I shall be your brother-in-law. Sha'n't I? And if you marry Fiesole, she'll be my sister-in-law. Won't she? Well then, I've got a right to be pleased about her."

I took him at his word and told him everything that had happened and all that I knew about her. Continually he would break in with feverish words of surprise and flattery, leading me on still further to confess myself. In the magic world of that summer's afternoon no difficulties seemed insuperable. Married we could and would be. Parents and schoolmasters only existed for one purpose—to prevent boys and girls who fell in love from marrying: that was why grown-ups had all the money. In a natural state of society, where men lived in the woods, and wore skins, and carried clubs, these injustices would not happen.

So we unbosomed ourselves, only understanding vaguely the immensities that love and marriage meant. Then the bell for four o'clock school began calling and, like the slaves we were, we returned, on the run, to the Red House.

We found that we were not the only persons to be inflamed by the beauty of Fiesole. All the boys were talking about her. One of our chief fears was set at rest—her surname was not Sneard, but Cortona. Her father had been a famous Italian actor married to Sneard's sister, and both her parents fortunately were dead. She had quite a lot of money and had come from a convent at Tours, where she was being educated, to stay with her uncle on a visit of undetermined length or brevity. This news had all been gathered by the Cow, who had that curious faculty for worming out information which some boys possess. He had extracted it from the groundman, who had extracted it from Sneard's gardener, who had extracted it from

Sneard's housemaid, with whom he was on more than friendly terms—so of course it was authentic.

That evening after prep I again stole out. The Bantam showed himself very impertinent—he wanted to come with me. I had great difficulty in persuading him that it wasn't necessary. I found Fiesole in the summer-house. She was subdued and wistful, and insisted on asking questions about that nice boy she had seen with me. I told her frankly that he was engaged to my sister, and gave her a graphic account of how my father had turned him out of Pope Lane. I fear I made him seem altogether too romantic. She made careful inquiries about the appearance of Ruthita, which I took as a sign of encouragement—a foreknowledge that sooner or later I intended to ask her to become one of my family. When the bell rang for prayers and we parted, I held her hand a little longer, but experienced my old reluctance in the matter of kissing.

Next morning fate played me a scurvy trick; I woke with a bad sore throat, due I suppose to my escapade of the night earlier, and was sent to the infirmary. On the evening of the day I came out, which was four days later, I was summoned after prep to report myself to the doctor. This made me late in getting to the summer-house.

The bell for prayers had commenced to ring as I got there. I was climbing through the hedge when I heard footsteps on the garden path. There were two children standing hushed amid the roses, the one with face tremulously uplifted, the other looking down with eager eyes. As I watched their lips met. It was impossible for me to stir without making my presence known. One of them came bolting into me, going out by the way I was entering. We rolled over and I recognized the Bantam. Fiesole, hearing the angry voices of two boys quarreling, ran. And so I got my first experience of the lightness of woman's affection.

However, if I was seeking a revenge, I got it. Before the end of the summer term Pigtales became suspicious, and discovered the Cow in the summer-house with the fickle

Fiesole. The Cow, because he was a monitor, was expelled and I was appointed in his place—Mordecai and Haman after a fashion. Fiesole, on account of her kissing propensities, was regarded as a dangerous person and sent away. I was a grown man when next I met her.

CHAPTER VII

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE SPUFFLER

It was during the last week of the summer term, while I was convalescing from Fiesole's sudden exit and was beginning to forgive the Bantam his treachery, that the magic personality of George Rapson first flashed into my little world.

I was sitting listlessly at my desk one sunshiny morning. The window at my side was open, commanding a view of the school garden, the driveway leading through it, and beyond that of the sleepy village street. Below the window grew a bed of lavender whose fragrance, drifting in, made me forgetful of the book which lay before me and of the master at the black-board chalking up dull problems in algebra. I was dreaming as usual, telling myself a story of what I would do if old Sneard should pop his head inside the door and say, "My dear Cardover, you have worked so well that I intend to make an example of you by giving you this day as a holiday."

Just then the master at the board turned round and jumped me into a realization of the present. "Cardover, you will please stand up and repeat my explanation of this problem."

I stood up and gazed stupidly at the medley of signs and abbreviated formulæ, hoping to discover some clue of reasoning in their apparent meaninglessness.

"Well?"

"If you please, sir, I wasn't attending."

"I thought not. If you had been, you would have known that I have not explained it yet. You will come to me after class and——"

But his sentence was never ended. At that moment the head of every boy turned as one head; yes, and even the head of the master turned. Up the driveway came the sound of prancing hoofs, the soft crunch of wheels in the gravel, and cries of, "Whoa, girl! Steady there, steady."

Past the window flashed a high yellow dog-cart, drawn by a tandem of spirited chestnuts. A tiger in livery and top-hat sat behind with arms folded, superbly aware of his own magnificence. Between the wheels ran a Dalmatian, a plum-pudding dog as we used to call them. On the high front-seat were two men, equally gorgeous. The one who drove wore a large fawn coat with enormous pearl buttons, distinctly horsey in cut and fashion. On his head was a tall beaver hat. He was a massively built man and had the appearance of a sporting aristocrat. To make him more splendid, he was young, with a bronzed complexion, full red lips, and finely chiseled features. His companion looked like a Methodist parson, trying to pass as a racing gent. He was attired in a light tweed suit of a rather pronounced black and white check. On his head was a gray felt hat, and in his button-hole blazed a scarlet geranium. They were laughing in deep full-throated guffaws as they whizzed past, with the sun flashing on their wheels and harness. The tiger and the Dalmatian were the only solemn things about them. What was my surprise to have recognized in the second man a relative?

"It's my uncle!"

Even the master, so recently bent on my humiliation, seemed to hold his breath in regarding the nephew of so resplendent a person. Here was poetic justice with a vengeance. Most of the boys' friends, if they were too rich to walk from the station when they came to visit them, crawled up the hill in a musty creaking cab, with hard wooden seats, and two or three handfuls of straw on the floor, more or less dirty. In the history of the Red House no boy's relative had dashed up to visit him with such a barbaric clatter and display of wealth. Ah, if Fiesole had

been there to envy me, how she would have blamed herself for her falseness!

"Cardover, you may sit down."

The master turned again to the black-board, forgetting the threatened penalty. The boys eyed me above the covers of their books, and awaited further developments.

The door opened and Sneard peered round on us short-sightedly. A pleased smile played about the corners of his diplomatic mouth. His happiness at receiving such distinguished callers seemed to have had an effect upon his hair, turning it to a yet more fiery red. Usually when he spoke he snapped, but now his tones were as fluty as he could make them with so little practice.

Turning to the master, "Is Dante Cardover here?" he inquired. When I was pointed out to him he said, "Mr. George Rapson is here and with him your uncle, Mr. Spreckles. You may take a holiday, Dante, and go out with them."

I rose from my seat in an ecstasy of bewilderment. What under the sun had happened that old Sneard should call me Dante, and who was Mr. George Rapson? As I picked my way through the labyrinth of forms and desks, getting glimpses of my school-mates' lengthened faces, I felt that I was taking the sunlight from the room by my good fortune as I left.

I followed Sneard to his study, which I had so often visited on such different errands. Even now as I crossed its threshold, I could not quite shake off my accustomed clammy dread. The Spuffler, catching sight of me, ran forward in his gayest manner. "Ah, Dante, old chap, it's good to see you. Rapson's heard so much about you that he couldn't keep away any longer. 'Spreckles,' he said, 'you've got to introduce me. It's Dante, Dante, all day long. You can't talk of anyone else.' So here we are. Rapson, this is my nephew."

Mr. Rapson grabbed me by the shoulder with a large white hand and gazed down on me. There was a jolly-dog air about him combined with a big healthy strength, which

made one both like and fear him from the first. And there was so much of him to like; he was over six foot in height and proportionately built in breadth. "Hm! Dante. Glad to meet you. Let's get out."

Sneard wanted me to put on my Sunday suit, but Mr. Rapson wouldn't hear of it. "Hated clothes when I was a kid. Still think we ought to go naked. Let him be as he is. He's got nothing to spoil and therefore'll enjoy himself."

Without waiting for a reply, he nodded to Sneard, heaved his great shoulders through the doorway, so down the hall and out on to the steps where the tiger was holding the horses' heads.

"Just like Rapson," my uncle said. "Masterful fellow. Makes up his mind and then goes ahead. Good-day, Mr. Sneard. Oh, yes, we'll take care of him and bring him back."

They took me up in front beside them; the whip cracked and the tiger sprang away from the leader. Off we sped, down the hill and into the valley, winding in and out of overgrown lanes where we had to duck our heads to avoid the boughs; then out again with fields on either side of us, up hill and down dale never slackening, with the wind on our cheeks and the sun in our faces. Mr. Rapson's attention was completely taken up with his driving; it needed to be, for he swung round corners and squeezed between farm-wagons in outrageously reckless fashion. I watched his strong masterful hands, how they gathered in the reins and forced the horses to obedience. My eyes wandered up him and rested on his face: the face of a man a little over thirty, calm and yet when stern almost cruelly determined, with a shapely beak of a Roman nose planted squarely in the middle of it—a sign-post to his purpose.

Then I glanced at my uncle with his fashionable checks and scarlet geranium. I remembered that my grandmother called him the Spuffler, and wondered what she would call him now, could she see him. That nervous air he had had, of at once asserting and apologizing for himself with a

pitiful display of bluster, had vanished. He carried himself with the jaunty confidence of a middle-aged gentleman unsubdued by the world—one who knew how to be dignified when necessary, but who preferred at present to relax. Above all he conveyed the impression of one beautifully fond of life's simple pleasures and quietly composed in a happy self-respect. What had done it? Was it George Rapson, or had he at last had success with one of his poultry experiments?

Perhaps he guessed some of the inquiries that were running through my head, for, as I crouched near him in the little space allotted me on our high up perch, he squeezed my hand, hinting at some great secret, for the telling of which we must be alone by our two selves.

With foam flying from the horses' mouths we entered Richmond and glittered down those quaint and narrow streets, which have always seemed to me more like streets of a seaport than of an inland town. We turned a corner; full before us drifted up the long and shadowy quiet of the Thames.

Mr. Rapson refused to be sociable until he had seen to the rubbing down and stabling of his horses; so we two wandered off together along the miniature quays, where boatmen with a deep-sea sailor's swagger pulled clay pipes from their mouths and wished us a cheerfully mercenary "Good-mornin'."

My curiosity was inarticulate with a multitude of crowding questions. I couldn't make my choice which to ask first. I watched the swans sail in and out the tethered boats, and racked my brain for words. Then I blurted out, "What does it all mean, Uncle Obad?"

His eyes filled with tears. "My boy, it means success."

I mumbled something typically boylike and inadequate about being "jolly glad." He slipped his arm through mine with that endearing familiarity he had, as though I were a man. He was too excited to sit down, so we strolled along the quays, under the creeper-covered red-

brick walls of the houses, and out of Richmond along the open river-bank.

"No one ever believed that I'd do it, Dante. I don't think you did yourself. They all said, 'Oh, Spreckles! Ha, the fellow who twiddles his thumbs while his wife works!' They didn't say it to my face—they didn't dare. But that was what they thought about me. I seemed a failure—a good-natured incompetent. Even people who liked me felt ashamed of me—I mean people who were dear to me, living in the same house. Women want their husbands to measure up to the standards of other men. It's natural—I don't blame 'em. But, you know, I never had a chance, old chap—never seemed to find my right kind of work. I couldn't do little things well. I'm one of those imperial men who need something big to bring the best out of 'em. And now I've got it—I've got it, Dante."

I caught his excitement, and begged him to tell me what this wonderful something was that had so suddenly transformed him from a nobody into a powerful person. I felt sure he was powerful, apart from anything he said, for he radiated opulence. He halted in the middle of the tow-path, gripping me by the shoulders, laughing into my face and bidding me guess. I guessed everything possible and impossible. Losing patience, "It's diamond mines," he burst out.

"But how did you get 'em, Uncle Obad, and where?"

For an instant I had a wild vision of men with pickaxes, shovels, and miners' lamps, digging down into the bowels of the Christian Boarding House.

We seated ourselves on the bank with legs dangling above the water, and he told me. It seemed that Mr. George Rapson was the cause of this meteoric rise to prosperity. In April he had come to stay at Charity Grove as an ordinary paying-guest. From the first he was extraordinary and had amazed them with his wealth—his horses, his clothes, his friends, and his lavish manners. Most of his fellow boarders were struggling young men, who earned

two pounds a week in the City and paid twenty-five shillings for their keep and lodging. On the start they only knew that he was a South African, holiday-making in England. Little by little he let out that he was interested in diamond mines, and later that he owned *The Ethiopian*, one of the most promising properties of its kind in the world. The more communicative he became, the more surprised they were that he should make his head-quarters at a Christian Boarding House. There seemed no reason why he should not pay a higher price and enjoy the advantages of a secular environment.

One night he took my uncle into his room, locked the door, and let the cat out of the bag. It was my uncle and his personality that had attracted him. He had seen his name as secretary to so many thriving philanthropic societies that he had been led to appreciate his worth as an organizer. He wanted his help. He had come to England to unload a number of shares in *The Ethiopian* diamond mines, but it had to be done quietly and without advertisement. He had a number of unscrupulous enemies in the mining world who wanted to merge his property with theirs. They had tried to crowd him out in various ways—once by bringing about a law-suit to dispute his title to his holdings. If they should get wind that shares in *The Ethiopian* were to be bought in the open market, they would buy up every share in sight in an effort to gain control. Therefore it was necessary that business should be carried on in a private manner, and as far as possible through channels of personal friendship rather than those of the City and the Stock Exchange.

He had studied my uncle carefully and was convinced that he was just the man for the work. He proposed giving him a salary of one thousand pounds a year to act as his English agent, and a five-per-cent commission on all sales of shares that he was instrumental in effecting. His chief service was to consist in supplying lists of names and addresses of the moneyed religious public, and in applying his influence to the attracting of purchasers. The

lists were of course to be culled mainly from the contributors to the charitable societies of which he was secretary. In fact, what the proposal amounted to, as I see it now, was that my uncle's integrity, well-known among religious circles, was to guarantee the worth of the shares.

"It's a close secret, Dante," my uncle said. "Rapson won't let me tell anyone, not even your Aunt Lavinia, the basis of our understanding. But I had to tell somebody; happiness isn't happiness when you keep its reason to yourself. So I've told you, because we've had so many secrets together."

We sat on, quite forgetful of time, watching the sleepy flowing of the river, building castles in the air. Last month they had declared their half-yearly dividend and it had amounted to twenty per cent. Since then the sale of shares had quickened enormously. Why, there was one morning's mail when my uncle's commissions alone had amounted to fifty pounds. Think of that—and it was only the beginning! Then we commenced to reckon how much he would have in five years, if his commissions amounted always to fifty pounds a morning, and he made a rule to spend nothing but his salary. It was the old childish game which had first made us chummy, of so many hens laying so many eggs, and how much would we have at the end of a twelvemonth.

He could afford to joke now concerning the penury of his lean years before the great Rapson had put in an appearance. He even made fun of his own *spuffling*, and laughed as he told me how much economy those odd shillings and half-crowns, which he used to give me in such a large manner, had cost him.

"But it's all over now," he said cheerfully, "and I'm going to be an important man. People are beginning to look up to me already. Who knows?—one day I may enter Parliament. I'm moving in a different social set—Rapson's friends. He's very well-connected. They're a little gay and larky, you know; your Aunt Lavinia don't quite know

what to make of 'em. She'll get over that. Oh, but it's a big new world for me, Dante, and there's heaps of things to do in it that I never knew about."

On our way back the great George Rapson himself met us, and we found that we'd been gone an hour. He told us that he'd ordered lunch at a little inn, called *The White Cross*—one which hung over the river.

How proud I was to walk beside him as we re-entered Richmond! Everyone turned to stare after him as he passed, with his long fawn coat open and flapping, his easy rollicking laugh, his great height and distinguished presence. And I, Dante Cardover, was by way of being the friend of such a man! The gates of romance were indeed opening.

The White Cross Inn had separate balconies, built out from each of its second-story windows. In one of these our table was set. The little tiger helped the maid of the inn to wait upon us. And what a meal we had!—salmon and salad and fowl, stuffed veal and pine-apple, dates, almonds, and raisins—everything that a boy could ask to have. Up the walls of the inn climbed rambler roses and tumbled over the sides of the balcony. Beneath us lay the river, like a silver snake, lazily uncurled, sunning itself in great green meadows.

"This is to be your day, Dante," Mr. Rapson said. "We brought some of these things from London because we knew you liked 'em. You discovered your Uncle Obad before I did, and when no one else had. He's told me all about it. Here's your very good health."

The tiger, who had been drawing the cork out of a large green bottle about half as tall as himself, now poured out a golden foamy liquid. I found one glass of it had the same care-freeing effect that the holding of Fiesole's hand in the summer-house had had. I felt myself at ease in the world, and began to speak of the Reverend Robert Sneard as "jolly old Sneard," and of all people who had authority over me with tolerant contempt. I gazed back from the security of my temporary Canaan, and gave my

entertainers a whimsical account of my perilous journey through the wilderness of boyhood. It was wonderful even to myself how suddenly my shyness had vanished.

Mr. Rapson seemed highly amused. "You'll do, young 'un," he said.

Then, little by little, he began to speak of Africa—the dust, the Kaffirs, and the wide, parched veldt. He spoke of adventures with lions far up in the interior, and of how he had once been an ivory-hunter before he struck it lucky in the south. "I ran away from home when I was a youngster of twenty and all because of a girl." He nodded at me wisely across the table, "Keep clear of the girlies, they're the devil."

I thought of Fiesole and inquired if some girls weren't quite attractive devils. My uncle looked shocked in a genial fashion at this very free use of a forbidden word—the fear of Aunt Lavinia purged his vocabulary even when she was absent. But Mr. Rapson went red in the face and smacked his hands together, laughing loudly. "Of course they're attractive; else how'd they tempt us?"

A punt, which had stolen up beneath our balcony, now caught his attention. A girl in a gown of flowered muslin, with a broad pink sash about her waist, was standing in the stern. She was alone, and all the river formed a landscape for her daintiness.

Mr. Rapson stared hard at her; her back was towards us. "Seem to know her hair," he muttered. He half rose. "By George, it's Kitty!"

Leaning far out over the balcony he called to her impulsively, "Kitty! Kitty!"

Very leisurely she lifted up to him a small flushed face, all laughter and naughtiness, and waved her hand. She was as pretty as love and a summer's day could make a woman—but I wasn't supposed to be old enough to observe such things as that.

She brought her punt in to the bank, while Mr. Rapson went down to help her out. When he gave her his hand to steady her, she kept it in hers. As she glanced mis-

chievously up at him I heard her say, "Why, George, you terror, who'd have thought of meeting you here!"

He whispered something to her with a frown; she dropped him a mocking courtesy.

When he brought her up on to the balcony, he introduced her as his cousin Kitty. She bowed to us with a roguish grace, clinging close to his arm. "Now, Kitty," he said, freeing himself, "you've got to behave."

Seeing that my uncle was looking at her in a puzzled manner, she took the center of the stage without embarrassment, explaining, "Georgie and I are very old friends and I've not seen him, oh, for ages."

When they had told her how they happened to be there and that it was my day, and that they had stolen me away from my lessons, she swung round on me with a kind of rapture. "Oh, what darlings to do that! And what a nice boy!" Without further ado she patted my face and kissed me. It was a new sensation. I blushed furiously, and was both pleased and abashed. "You may be older than I am," I thought; "but you're only a girl. In three years I could marry you."

She was like a happy little dog in a meadow; never still, sending up birds—following nothing and chasing everything. In her conversation she gamboled about and never ceased gamboling. She didn't sit quietly like the Snow Lady and all the other ladies of my acquaintance, putting in a word now and then, but letting the men do the talking. She made everybody look at her—perhaps, because she was so well worth looking at. Even before she had kissed me I was in love with her.

Mr. Rapson seemed a little nervous, and she appeared to delight in his fear of her daring.

"Georgie's always had a passion for me," she said, "though he won't own it." Then suddenly, seeing the troubled expression on his face, "How much has the poor dear told you about himself?"

She wriggled out of me something of the story of his doings. She eyed him archly from under her big hat and,

when I had ended, leant across the table so their faces nearly met. "How many lions did my Georgie kill in Africa?"

"Be quiet, you little devil," he laughed, seizing her by the hands.

The employment of that forbidden word set me wondering whether this was the girl for love of whom he first went wandering. But she looked too young for that.

We went into her punt and drifted down the river with the current. She played the madcap all the way, speaking to him often in baby language. He seemed to be amused by it, as a St. Bernard might be amused by the impertinence of a terrier. When she got too bold he would hold her hands until she was quiet, overpowering her with his great strength much the same as he did his horses. Then she would turn her attentions to me for a time, and I would make believe to myself she was Fiesole. My uncle looked on like a benevolent Father Christmas, dignified and smiling.

Dusk was settling when we started on the return journey. We found that we had drifted further than we had intended. Mr. Rapson took the pole and did the punting. Miss Kitty sang to him, she said to encourage him. I think it must have been then that I first heard *Twickenham Ferry*. She had to leave off part way through the last verse I remember. She said that the mist from the river choked her; but I, lying on the cushions beside her, somehow gathered the impression that she was nearly crying. When she broke down, under cover of darkness I got my hand into hers, and then she slipped her arm about me. After that she was very subdued and silent. My uncle fell off to sleep, and Mr. Rapson kept his face turned away from us, busy with his punting. I wondered if, after all, Miss Kitty was happy.

It was night when we arrived. She insisted on parting with us at the landing, saying that her houseboat was just across the river and she could take the punt home quite well unaccompanied. We had said good-by and were

walking along the quay, when Rapson left us and ran back. I saw him come close and bend over her. They seemed to be whispering together. Then she pushed out into the river; the lights of the town held her for a time; darkness closed in behind her and she vanished.

On the drive back to the Red House I grew drowsy. I tried to keep my eyes open, but even the soft moonlight seemed dazzling. The meadows and tall trees stealing by, ceased to stand out separate, but became a blur. The sharp *trit-trot, trit-trot* of the horses' hoofs on the hard macadam road lulled me by their monotonous regularity.

When I came to myself I heard my uncle saying, "I like that little cousin of yours, Rapson; she's charming and different from any woman that I ever met."

"Daresay she is," Rapson answered, dryly; "you've led such a sheltered life. Of course she isn't my cousin."

"Who is she, then?"

"Oh, a nymph."

"A nymph! You have the better of me there. That's a classical allusion, no doubt. I don't understand."

"Never mind, papa," Mr. Rapson said cheerfully; "I didn't think you would understand. It's just as well."

Then he commenced speaking to his horses. "So, girl! Steady there! Steady!"

I rubbed my eyes, and saw that we were ascending Eden Hill.

CHAPTER VIII

MONEY AND HAPPINESS

DEEP down in their secret hearts all the Spuffler's relations had felt that his permanent failure to get on in the world was a kind of disgrace to themselves. They resented it, but as a rule kept quiet about it "for the sake of poor Lavinia." My aunt was always "poor Lavinia," when mentioned by her family. Before strangers, needless to say, they helped him to keep up his pretense of importance and spoke of him with respect. But the thought that a man who had intermarried with them, should have lowered his wife to the keeping of a boarding-house rankled. Even as a child I was conscious that my close attachment to my uncle Obad was regarded with disapprobation. He was the Ishmael of our tribe.

At first none of his relatives would believe in his mushroom prosperity. Perhaps, they did not want to believe in it; it would entail the sacrifice of life-long prejudices. They pooh-poohed it as the most extravagant example of his fantastic spuffling. On my return home for the summer holidays I very soon became aware of an atmosphere of half-humorous contempt whenever his name was mentioned. Once when I took up the cudgels for him, declaring that he was really a great man, the Snow Lady patted my hand gently, calling me "a blessed young optimist." My father, who rarely lost his temper, told me I was speaking on a subject concerning which I was profoundly ignorant.

On a visit to Charity Grove I was grieved to find that even Aunt Lavinia was skeptical. Despite the jingling of money in my uncle's pockets, she insisted on living in the old

proud hand-to-mouth fashion, making the spending capacity of each penny go its furthest. Her house was still understaffed in the matter of servants—servants who could be procured at the lowest wages. She still did her shopping in the lower-class districts, where men cried their wares on the pavement beneath flaring naphtha-lamps and slatternly women elbowed your ribs and mauled everything with dirty hands before they purchased. Here housekeeping could be contrived on the smallest outlay of capital.

Uncle Obad might go to fashionable tailors; she clothed herself in black, because it wore longest and could be turned. She listened to his latest optimisms a little wearily with a sadly smiling countenance, as a mother might listen to the plans for walking of a child hopelessly crippled. She had heard him speak bravely so many, many times, and had been disappointed, that she had permanently made up her mind that she would have to go on earning the living for both of them all her life.

Yet she loved him as well as a woman could a man for whom she was only sorry; she was constantly on the watch to defend him from the disapprobation of the world. But she refused ever again to be beguiled into believing that he would take his place with other men. So, when he told her that they didn't need to keep on the boarding-house, she scarcely halted long enough in her work to listen to him. And when he said that he could now afford her a hundred pounds for dress, she bent her head lower to hide a smile, for she didn't want to wound him. And when he brought her home a diamond bracelet, she tried to find out where it had been purchased in order that she might return it on the quiet.

Gradually, however, she began to be persuaded that this time it wasn't all bluster. The gallantry of his attitude towards herself was the unaccountable element. Not so long ago it had been she who was the man about the house, and he had been a kind of grown-up boy. Once she had allowed him to kiss her; now he kissed her masterfully as by right of conquest. He had become a man at last,

after halting at the hobbledehoy stage for fifty years. He treated her boldly as a lover, striving to draw out her womanhood. He was making up the long arrears of affection which, up to this time, he had not felt himself worthy to display.

One evening in the garden he tore the bandage of doubt from her eyes. I was there when it happened. We were down in the paddock, the home of the fowls, where so many of our dreams had taken place. The gaunt London houses to the right of us were doing their best to shut out the sunset. Aunt Lavinia began to wonder how much the little hay-crop would fetch this year. She was disappointed because it had grown so thin, and there seemed no promise of rain.

"It doesn't matter, my dear," said my uncle cheerfully.

"Obad, how can you say that!"

He pressed up to her flushing like a boy, placing his arms about her and lifting her face. "Lavinia, are you never going to trust me?"

The sudden tenderness and reproach in his voice stabbed her heart into wakefulness. When she spoke, her words came like a cry: "Oh, Obad, how I wish I could believe it true this time!"

"But it is true, my dearest."

I stole away, and did not see them again till an hour later when they wandered by me arm-in-arm through the wistful twilight. Within a week I knew that she had accepted his prosperity as a fact, for he gave her a blue silk dress and she wore it. But he had harder work in getting her to give up the boarding-house. His great argument was that Rapson advised it—it would advance their social standing. She fenced and hesitated, but finally promised on the condition that he was still succeeding in November.

I think it must have been the news of her surrender that sapped the last foundation of my father's skepticism. At any rate, shortly after this, when my uncle by special invitation came over to Pope Lane, he was given one of my father's best cigars as befitted a rich relative. The best glass and

silver were put out. We all had unsoiled serviettes and observed uncomfortable company manners. In the afternoon he was carried off to my father's study and remained there till long past the tea-hour.

Later my father told me the subject of their discussion. By dint of hard saving he had put by two thousand pounds for planting me out in the world, part of which was to pay for my Oxford education. Having heard of that half-yearly twenty-per-cent dividend which the *Ethiopian* shares had paid and that they were still being issued privately, at par value, he was inclined to entrust his money to my uncle, if he could prove the investment sound. If the mines were as good as they appeared to be, he would get four hundred pounds a year in interest—which would make all the difference to our ease of life. There was another consultation; the next thing I knew the important step had been taken.

All our power of dreaming now broke loose. It became our favorite pastime to sit together and plan how we would spend the four hundred pounds.

"Why, it's an income in itself," my father would exclaim; "I shall be freed forever from the drudgery of hack-work."

And the Snow Lady would say, "Now you'll be able to turn your mind to the really important things of life—the big books which you've always hoped to write."

And Ruthita would sidle up to him in her half-shy way, and rub her cheek against his face, saying nothing.

A wonderful kindness nowadays entered into all our domestic relations. My father's weary industry, which had sent us all tiptoeing about the house, began to relax. Even for him work lost something of its sacredness now that money was in sight. He no longer frowned and refused to look up if anyone trespassed into his study. On the contrary, he seemed glad of the excuse for laying aside his pen and discussing what place in the whole wide world we should choose, when we were free to live where we liked.

It should be somewhere in Italy—Florence, perhaps. For years it had been his unattainable dream to live among olive-groves of the Arno valley. We read up guide-books and histories about it. Soon we were quite familiar with the Pitti Palace, the Ponte Vecchio, and the view from the Viale dei Colli at sundown. These and many places with beautiful and large-sounding names, became the stock-in-trade of our conversation. And the brave, looked-down-on Spuffler was the faery-godmother who had made these dreams realities.

A tangible proof of the promised change in our financial status was experienced by myself on my return to school in a more liberal allowance of pocket-money. As yet it was only a promised change, for the half-yearly dividend would not be declared until January, and would not be paid till a month later.

What one might call "a reflected proof" came when we went over to spend Christmas with Uncle Obad at Chelsea.

Yes, Aunt Lavinia had succumbed to her good fortune. The Christian Boarding House had been abandoned and a fine old house had been rented, standing nearly at the corner of Cheyne Row, looking out across the river to Battersea.

On Christmas Eve my uncle's carriage came to fetch us. That was a surprise in itself. It was his present to Aunt Lavinia, all brand new—a roomy brougham, with two gray horses, and a coachman in livery. From this it will be seen that he had not kept his bargain with himself, made that day at Richmond, to live only on his salary.

A slight fall of snow was on the ground; across London we drove, the merriest little family in all that shopping crowd. We had scarcely pulled up against the pavement and had our first peep of the fine big house, when the front-door flew open, letting out a flood of light which rippled to the carriage like a golden carpet unrolled across white satin.

There stood Uncle Obad, frock-coated and glorious, with Aunt Lavinia beside him, dressed all in lavender—not at

all the prim, businesslike little woman, half widow, half hospital nurse, of my earliest recollection. She was as beaming and excited as a young girl, and greeted the Snow Lady by throwing her arms about her and whispering, "Oh, doesn't it seem all too good to be true?"

The Snow Lady kissed her gaily on both cheeks, saying, "True enough, my dear. At any rate, Obad's carriage was very real."

How changed we were from the solemn polite personages who had considered it a point in our favor that we knew how to bottle our emotions. We laughed and rollicked, and made quite poor jokes seem brilliant by the sparkle with which we told or received them. And all this was done by money; in our case, merely by the promise of money! When a boy remembered what we all had been, it was a transformation which called for reflection.

My uncle with his jolly rich-relative manner was the focus-point of our attentions. Aunt Lavinia and, in fact, we all felt flat whenever he went out of the room. She followed after him like a little dog, with dumb admiring eyes, waiting to be petted. She told the Snow Lady that she couldn't blame herself enough and could never make it up to him, for having lived with him in the same house all those years without having discovered his goodness. Then, as ladies will, they kissed for the twentieth time and did a little glad crying together.

So the stern grayness, which comes of a too frequent pondering on a diminishing bank-account, had vanished from the faces of our elders. Ruthita and I looked on and wondered. A great house had something to do with it, and heavy carpets, and wide fire-places, and fine shiny furniture, but underlying it all was money.

Christmas Eve I was awakened by the playing of waits outside my window. I looked out at the broad black river, with the ropes of stars, which were the lights of bridges, flung across it. And I looked at the untrodden snow, stretching far down the Embankment, gleaming and shadowy, making London seem a far-away, forgotten

country. Then fumbling in the darkness, I looked in my stocking and drew out a slip of paper. By the light of a match, I discovered it to be a check from my aunt and uncle for fifty pounds. Comparing notes in my night-gown with Ruthita next morning, I found that she had another for the same amount.

Ah, but that was something like a Christmas! Never a twenty-fifth of December comes round but I remember it. My father summed it all up when he said, "Well, Obad, now you've struck it lucky, you certainly know how to be generous."

He certainly did, and proved amply that only poverty had prevented him in former days from being the best loved man in the family. Only one person roused more admiration than my uncle, and that was Mr. Rapson. My father had never met him, so he had been invited to the Christmas dinner. At the last moment he had excused himself, saying that he had an unavoidable engagement with a lady. However, he turned up late in the evening with Miss Kitty on his arm and a fur-coat on his back. Somehow they both seemed articles of clothing; he wore them with such perfect assurance, as though they were so much a part of himself. In the hall he took off his fur-coat, and then he had only Miss Kitty to wear.

It was awe-inspiring to see the deference that was paid him and the ease with which he accepted every attention. My father, with the sincerest simplicity, almost thanked him to his face for selling him *The Ethiopian* shares.

Of course he had to tell his lion-stories and how he went hunting ivory in Africa. My uncle trotted him about as though he were a horse, reminding him of all his paces. Mr. Rapson was *his* discovery—*his* property. We all sat round and hero-worshipped. Miss Kitty seemed overwhelmed by the greatness of the house and the general luxury.

She appeared particularly shy of the ladies. After she had gone they declared her to be a dumb, doll-like little creature, with her quiet eyes and honey-colored hair. I

sniggered, and they said, "What's the matter with the boy? Why are you gurgling, Dante?"

I was thinking of another occasion, when she was neither dumb nor doll-like.

Now, quite contrary to her behavior at Richmond, she remained almost motionless on the chair in which Mr. Rapson had placed her, looking like a beautiful obedient piece of jewelry, waiting till her owner got ready to claim her. Only at parting did she show me any sign of recollection and then, while all eyes were occupied with Mr. Rapson, she whispered, "You were good to me at Richmond. I don't forget."

We stayed with my uncle four days. To us children it was a kind of tragedy when we left. "We must do this every year," my uncle said.

"If we ar'n't in Florence," my father replied gaily.

Going back to school this time was a sore trial—it meant moving out of the zone of excitement. It seemed that every day something new must happen; and then there was so much to talk about. However, I got my pleasure another way—by the things I let out at school, with a boy's natural boastfulness, about my uncle. I found myself, what I had always desired to be, genuinely and extremely popular. Money again! I let them know that they would probably only have the privilege of my society for a little while as, in all likelihood, I should be living in Florence next year.

This term two events happened, intimately related to one another in their effect upon my career, though at the time no one could have suspected any connection between them.

Lady Zion, the Creature's sister, had certainly got more crazy in the years that had elapsed since I first met her. The winter was a heavy one and the snow fell far into February; yet nothing could restrain her, short of an asylum, from wandering about in the bleakest weather all over the countryside. Sometimes she would stay out far into the night, and on several occasions the Creature and I had to go out and search for her. I have seen her pass

me five miles from home, riding on her little ass, talking to herself, all unaware of anything around her.

She was a temptation to the village-boys, and they would frequently torment her. The antagonism between the Red House and the village ran high. In a sense she was school property; we would make a chance of rescuing her an excuse for a free-fight. This meant that when the enemy found her alone, they took the opportunity of displaying their spite.

On the fourteenth of February she had been out all day. No one had seen her; by nightfall she had not returned. The Creature got permission to have me go out with him to hunt for her. It was necessary that someone should go with him because he was short-sighted. We investigated all her favorite haunts, but found not a trace of her. We inquired of farmers and travelers on the road, but heard nothing satisfactory. If she had gone by field-routes this was not remarkable, for all the country was covered with snow. Her white draped figure against the white landscape made it easy for her to escape observation.

The poor old Creature was getting worried; we had been three hours searching and hadn't got a clue. I did my best to cheer him, and at last proposed that we should return to his cottage as sometimes the donkey had brought her back of himself.

From the point where we then stood our shortest route lay cross-country through a wood, skirting a little dell. Under the trees it was very dark although the moon was shining, for the trees grew close together. We were passing by the dell when I happened to look aside. The moonlight, falling across it, showed me something standing there. I asked the Creature to wait while I went and examined it. As I got nearer, I saw it was alive; then I recognized Lady Zion's donkey. It had halted over what appeared to be a drift of snow. On coming closer I saw that it was Lady Zion herself. Something warned me not to call her brother.

Bending down, I turned her over and drew the straggling

hair from off her face. There was a red gash in her forehead and red upon the snow. By the fear that seized me when I touched her, I knew.

Coming back to the Creature I told him it was nothing—I had been mistaken. At the school-house I made an excuse to leave him while he went on to the cottage. When he was out of sight I ran panic-stricken to Sneard's study and told him. The two of us, without giving the alarm, returned to the wood and brought her home. The Creature was just setting out again when we reached the cottage. By the limp way in which she hung across the donkey's back, he realized at a glance what had happened. Catching her in his arms, he dragged her down on to the road and, kneeling over her, commenced to sob and sob like an animal, not using any words, in a low moaning monotone.

One by one windows in the village-street were thrown open; frowsy heads stuck out; lights began to grope across the panes; the sleeping houses woke and a promiscuous crowd of half-clad people gathered. Above the intermittent babel of questions and answers was the constant sound of the Creature's sobbing.

Next morning the news of Lady Zion's death was common property. Detectives came down from London and a thorough effort was made to trace the murderer. Near the spot in the dell where she had been discovered, half-a-dozen snowballs lay scattered. It was supposed that a village-boy had come across her there, and in one of the snowballs he had thrown, purposely or accidentally, had buried a stone; then, seeing her fall, had run away in terror.

At the school various rumors went the round. The one which found most favor, though we all knew it to be untrue, was that Sneard had done it. His supposed motive was his well-known annoyance at Lady Zion's irritating obsession that he had once loved her.

In the midst of this excitement, while the London detectives were still hunting, I received a telegram from my father, unexplained and peremptory, "*Return immediately. Bring all belongings.*"

CHAPTER IX

THE DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES

OF course the telegram was connected in some way with the payment of the first half-yearly dividend. Perhaps my father had decided on an instant removal to Italy. So my schoolmates thought as they stood enviously watching me pack.

Towards evening I stepped into the village's one and only cab. I shook the dust of the Red House from my feet without regret. With the intense selfishness of youth, my own hope for the future made me almost forgetful of the Creature's tragedy.

It was about eight o'clock when I reached Pope Lane. All the front of the house was in darkness. I tugged vigorously at the bell, feeling a little slighted that none of them had been on the look-out. Directly the door opened, I rushed in with a mouthful of excited questions. Hetty stared at me disapprovingly. "Don't make so much noise, Master Dante," she said; "your mother and Miss Ruthita 'ave 'ad a worryin' day and 'ave gorn to bed. They didn't know you was comin'."

I noticed that the stairway was unlighted, that the gas in the hall was on the jet, and that Hetty herself was partly prepared for bed. I was beginning to explain to her about the telegram, speaking below my breath the way one does when death is in the house. Just then my father came out from his study. His pen was behind his ear and his shoulders looked stoopy. His face had the worn expression of the old days, which came from overwork.

"Father, why did you send for me?"

He led me into the study, closing the door behind him.

"You've got to be brave."

At his words my heart sank. My eyes retreated from his face. I wanted to lengthen out the minutes until I should know the worst.

"My boy, your Uncle Obad's gone to smash. We've lost everything."

He seated himself at the table, his head supported on his hand. He had tried to speak in a matter-of-fact manner, as much as to say, "Of course this is just what we all expected." But I could see that hope had gone out of him. I wanted to say something decent and comforting; but everything that came to me seemed too grandiloquent. There was nothing adequate that could be said. Florence, realization of dreams, respite from drudgery—all the happiness that money alone could purchase and that had seemed so accessible, was now placed apparently forever beyond reach of his hand.

He took his pen from behind his ear and commenced aimlessly stabbing the blotting-pad.

He spoke again, looking away from me. "That money was yours. I saved it for you. It was for giving you a chance in the world. I ought to have known that your uncle wasn't to be trusted—he's never been able to earn a living by honest work. But there, I don't blame him as much as I blame myself. I must have been mad."

"Shan't we get anything back?"

He shook his head. "This fellow Rapson is a common swindler, from what I can make out. He simply used your uncle. He may never have had any diamond mines. If he had, they were worthless. He doesn't appear to have had any capital except what he got by your uncle selling his shares. He paid his one dividend last summer in order to tempt investors, and now he's decamped. We shan't see a penny back."

I tried to tell him that he needn't worry for my sake—I could work.

"Yes, yes," he said, "that's why I sent for you. Of course your fees are all paid for this term; but if you've

got to enter the commercial world, the sooner the better. You've come to an age when every day spent at school is a day wasted, unless you're going to enter a profession. You can't get a University education without money and, in any case, it's worse than valueless unless you have the money to back it."

"But I don't mind working," I assured him; "I shall be glad to work. P'raps by starting early I'll be able to earn a lot of money and help you one day, Dad."

He frowned at my cheerfulness; he had finished with optimism forever. "You don't know what you're saying. Money isn't so easily earned. It took me fifteen years of pinching and scraping to save two thousand pounds." Then, conscious of ungraciousness, he added, "But I like your spirit, Dante, and it was good of you to say that."

His fear of heroics and sentiment made him rise quickly and turn out the lamp.

"Best go to bed."

I groped my way upstairs through the darkened house. There was something unnatural about its darkness. Its silence was not the silence of a house in which people were sleeping, but one in which they lay without rest staring into the shadows. In my bedroom I felt it indecent to light the gas. I sat by the window, looking out across gardens to our neighbors' illumined windows. Someone was playing a piano; it seemed disgustingly bad taste on their part to do that when we had lost two thousand pounds.

My thought veered round. What after all were two thousand pounds to be so miserable about! I began to feel annoyed with my father that he should have made such a fuss about it. I was sure that neither the Snow Lady nor Ruthita had wanted to go to bed so early. Probably he didn't really want to himself. He just got the idea into his head, and had forced it on the family. In our house, until Mr. Rapson came along, it had always been like that: he punished us, instead of the people who had hurt him, by the moods that resulted from his disappoint-

ments. Why, if it was simply a matter of my going to work, I rather liked the prospect. Anyhow, it was for the most part my concern. And then I remembered how sad he had looked, and was sorry that such thoughts had come into my head.

A tap at my door made me jump up conscience-stricken. "It's only Ruthita," a low voice said.

She crept in noiselessly as a shadow. Her warm arms went about my neck, drawing my face down to hers. "Oh, Dannie, I'm so, so sorry," she whispered.

"What about?"

"Because I've never missed welcoming you home ever since you went to school, and you needed me most of all this evening—and because you've got to go to work."

"That doesn't matter, Ruthie. If I go to work I'll earn money, and then I'll be able to do things for you."

"For me! Oh, you darling!" Then she thought a minute and her face clouded. "But no, if you go to work you'll marry. That's what always happens."

She stood gazing up at me, her face looking frailer and purer than ever in the darkness. She had slipped on a long blue dressing-gown to come and see me, and her long black hair hung loose about her. Just below the edge of her gown her small pale feet showed out. Then I realized for the first time that she had changed as I had changed; we were no longer children. Perhaps the same wistful imaginings, exquisite and alluring, had come to her. For her also the walls of childhood, which had shut out the far horizon, were crumbling. Then, with an overwhelming reverence, I became aware of the strange fascination of her appealing beauty.

She snuggled herself beside me in the window. We spoke beneath our breath in the hushed voices of conspirators, lest we should be heard by my father.

"I couldn't sleep," she said apologetically. "I was lonely, so I came to you. Everything and everybody seem so sad."

"It was your thoughts that were sad, Ruthie. What were you thinking about?"

She rubbed her cheek against mine shyly and I felt her tremble. "I was thinking about you. We're growing up, Dante. You may go away and forget—forget all about me and the Snow Lady."

"I shan't," I denied stoutly.

To which she replied, "But people do."

"Do what?"

"Forget. And then I'm not your sister really—only by pretense."

"Look here," I said, "you say that when boys earn money they marry. I don't think I ever shall because—well, because of something that has happened. So why shouldn't you and I agree to live always together, the same as we do now?"

She said that that would be grand; she would be a little mother to me. But she wanted to know what made me so sure that I would always be a bachelor. With the sincere absurdity of youth, the more absurd because of its sincerity, I confided my passion for Fiesole. "After what she has done," I said, "I could never marry her; and yet I love her too well ever to marry anybody else. I can only love golden hair now, and the golden hair of another girl would always remind me of Fiesole."

Ruthita was silent. Then I remembered that her hair was black and saw that I had been clumsy in my sentiment, so I added, "But, Ruthie, in a sister I think black hair is the prettiest color in the world."

After she had tiptoed away to her room and I had crept into bed, I lay awake thinking over her words—that she was only my sister by pretense.

Next day my father called me to him. "You had fifty pounds given you last Christmas. I want you to let me have it."

I supposed that he wanted me to lend it to him, so I gave him my book and we went together to the savings bank and drew it out. I noticed that he drew out Ruthita's

fifty pounds as well. We climbed on to the top of an omnibus; nothing was said about where we were going.

He had bought a paper and I read it across his arm as we journeyed. As he turned over from the first page my eye caught a column headed DISAPPEARANCE OF GEORGE RAPSON. Underneath was a complete account of the whole affair.

My uncle had been interviewed by a reporter and had given a generously indiscreet history of the catastrophe from beginning to end. He tried to defend Rapson, and by his own innocent disclosures pilloried himself as a sanguine, gullible old ass. He insisted on believing in Rapson's integrity. Things looked queer of course, but sooner or later there would be an explanation, satisfactory to everybody. What the nature of that explanation was likely to be he could not tell, but he hoped for the best. He was reported as having said that Mr. Rapson had repeatedly referred to secret enemies in the financial world. This was the reason he had given to Mr. Spreckles for not disposing of his shares through the ordinary channels.

Mr. Spreckles stated in his interview that, on the evening of the third of January, Rapson had called at his house. He seemed excited and said that certain plots were culminating against his interests which made an instant and secret visit to South Africa essential. He had not hinted at anything definitely serious, but, on the contrary, had given orders for the declaration of the half-yearly dividend, payment of which would not fall due till February. That evening he had disappeared; since then nothing had been heard of him. When four weeks later Mr. Spreckles drew checks on Rapson's bank-account for payment of the dividends, they were all returned to him dishonored. A month previously, on the morning of January the third, Rapson had withdrawn every penny.

All the names of the people who had lost money in the adventure were appended. For the most part they were wealthy widows and spinsters, heavy contributors to various philanthropies, just the kind of people who would

lack the business judgment which would have prevented them from entering into such a gamble. My father's name was the exception, and was given special attention, being headed *A Hard Case*. "Mr. Cardover, having endured in his early life the humiliations and struggles which not infrequently fall to the lot of an ambitious penniless young man, had determined that his son, Dante, should not suffer a like embittering experience. To this end he had saved two thousand pounds to start his son on a professional career. This boy was Mr. Spreckles' favorite nephew. Mr. Spreckles quotes the fact that it was he who induced Mr. Cardover to invest this money in *The Ethiopian Diamond Mines* as proof of his own honest belief in the value of the shares. The boy will probably now have to be withdrawn from the Red House, where he is being educated. Was it likely, Mr. Spreckles asked, that he would have been a party to the ruin of those whom he loved best, if he had for a moment suspected that the investment was not all that it was represented?"

I had proceeded so far with my reading, when my father crushed the paper viciously into a ball and tossed it over the side of the bus. For the first time within my remembrance I heard him swear. He was so overcome with irritation that he had to alight and walk it off. He kept throwing out jerky odds and ends of exclamations, speaking partly to me, partly to himself.

"The bungling ass!"

"Why did he need to drag our names into it?"

"A regular windbag!"

"First picks my pocket, then advertises my poverty. Thinks that he can prove himself honest by doing that!"

I put in a feeble word for my uncle, hinting that he didn't mean any harm and that it was easy to be wise after the event.

"That's the worst of people like your Uncle Spreckles," my father retorted hotly; "they never do mean any harm, and yet they're always getting into interminable messes."

The storm worked itself out; we climbed on to another

bus. At the end of an hour the streets became familiar, and I knew that we were nearing Chelsea.

We got down within a stone's throw of my uncle's house. There it stood overlooking the river, shut in with its wrought-iron palings, red and comfortable, and outwardly prosperous as when we had parted on its steps, promising to come again next Christmas if we weren't in Florence. But when we attempted to enter, we had proof that its outward appearance was a sham. The glory had departed, and with it had gone the white-capped servants.

The door was opened to us on the chain. A slatternly kitchen-maid peered out through the crack. She commenced to address us at once in a voice of high-pitched, impudent defiance.

"Wot yer want? Mr. Spreckles ain't 'ere, I tell yer. Yer the fortieth party this mornin' that's come nosin' rawnd. D'ye think I've got nothin' ter do 'cept run up and darn stairs h'answering bells? It's a shime the waie yer all piles inter one man. I calls it disgustin'. A better master a girl never 'ad."

I loved her for those words. They were the first that I had heard spoken in my uncle's defense. She was uttering all the pent up anger and sense of injustice that I had been too cowardly to express. Even on my father her fierce working-class loyalty to the under-dog had its effect.

"My good girl," he said, "you mustn't talk to me like that. I'm Mr. Cardover, who was staying here last Christmas."

Her manner changed audibly, literally audibly, at his tone of implied sympathy. She boo-hooed unrestrainedly as she slipped back the chain, permitting us to enter.

"I begs yer pardon, Mr. Cardover," she sniveled, dusting her eyes with her dirty apron. "I'm kind o' unnerved. My poor dear master's got so many h'enemies nar; I didn't rekernize yer as 'is friend. Yer see, the moment this 'ere 'appened all the other servants left like a pack o' rats. They didn't love 'im the waie I did; I come along wiv 'im from the boardin' 'arse. This mornin' 'e gives me notice,

'e did. 'Car'line, I carn't pay yer no more wyges,' 'e says. 'Gawd bless yer,' says I, 'an' if yer carn't, wot does that matter? I ain't one of yer 'igh and mighty, lawdy-dah hussies that I should desert yer.' Oh, Mr. Cardover, it's a shime the loife they're leadin' the poor man. But there, if they sends 'im to prison, I'll never agen put me nose h'insoide a church nor say no prayers. I'll just believe there ain't no Gawd in the world. The landlord, 'e's in there h'at present wiv 'im, a-naggin' at 'im. I was listenin' at the key'ole when yer rang the bell. But there, I'm keepin' yer witin'! Won't yer step into the drarin' room till 'e's by 'imself? H'excuse me dirty 'ands. I 'as to do h'everythin' for 'im—there's only me and the master; even the Missis 'as left."

As she was closing the door behind her, my father called after her, "Mrs. Spreckles left! That's astounding. Why has she done that?"

The tousled hair and red eyes re-appeared for a second. "Gorn back to start up the bo-ordin' 'arse," she stammered with a sob.

How different the room looked from when we were last in it! The cushions on the sofa were awry. The windows winked at you wickedly, one blind lowered and the other up. It had the bewildered, disheveled swaggerness of a last night's reveler betrayed by the sunrise.

Since Caroline had spoken my mind out for me, I felt awkward alone with my father. I was afraid of what he might say presently.

I picked up a small, handsomely bound volume from the table while we were waiting. I began turning the pages, and found that it was a collected edition of tracts, written by my uncle and ostensibly addressed to young men. They had been a kind of stealthy advertisement of The Christian Boarding-House, calculated to make maiden aunts, into whose hands they fell, sit up and feel immediately that the author was the very person for influencing the morals of their giddy nephews. Through the persuasive saintliness expressed in these tracts Uncle Obad had procured many

of his paying-guests. My eye was arrested by the title of one of them, THE DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES. I read, "One of our greatest poets has written of finding love in huts where poor men lie. Oh, that young men might be brought to ponder the truth contained in those words! What is more difficult to obtain than love in the whole world? Can riches buy love? Nay, but on the contrary love and wealth are rarely found together. Many a powerful financier and belted earl would give all that he has in exchange for love. Young men, when you come to die, which of all your possessions can you carry with you to an after-world? Then, at least, you will learn the deceitfulness of riches. You thought you had everything; too late you know that you had nothing. Even in this life some men live to learn that gold is but a phantom—a vampire phantom destroying friendship."

I had got so far when footsteps and voices, loud in contention, sounded in the hall. "You've got to be out of here in a fortnight, d'yer understand? You're letting down my property the longer you stay here. You're giving my house a bad name. The address is in all the papers; people are already pointing it out. I won't stand it. That's my last word."

The front door slammed. I heard the chain being put up. The handle of the drawing-room door turned hesitatingly and my uncle entered. He still wore the clothes of affluence, and yet the impression he made was one of shabbiness. He seemed to have shrunk. His jolly John Bull confidence had vanished and had been replaced by the hurried, appeasing manner of a solicitor of charity. He avoided our eyes and commenced talking at once, presumably to prevent my father from talking. He did not offer to shake hands.

"Well, Cardover, this is good of you. I hardly expected it. And, 'pon my word, there's Dante. I've been having a worried time of it. I'm a badly misunderstood man. But there, adversity has one advantage: it teaches us who *are* our friends. When the little storm has blown over I

shall know who to drop from my acquaintance. This sudden departure of Rapson has had a very unfortunate effect—most unfortunate. I expect a letter from him by every mail; then I'll be able to explain matters. A good fellow, Rapson. A capital fellow. As straight as they make 'em. One of the best. Still, I wish he'd told me more of his movements; for the moment affairs are a trifle awkward, I must confess."

He mopped his forehead with his handkerchief and sank down on the sofa with the air of one who, being among pleasant companions, brushes aside unpleasant topics. "Well, how's Dante?" he asked, turning to me, "and how's the Red House?"

I didn't know how to answer. The question seemed so inappropriate and irrelevant. All the kindness which lay between us made such conversation a cruel farce. I wanted to tell him how sorry I was, and yet I daren't in my father's presence. I realized that such cheeriness on my uncle's part was an insult, and yet I understood its motive.

My father's face had hardened. He had expected some apology, some sign of humility, or at least some direct appeal to his sympathy. If any of these things had happened after what Caroline had said, I believe he would have responded. But this insincere praise of the archculprit and ostrich-like refusal to face facts simply angered him. He rose to his feet with the restrained impatience of a just man; the drawn sternness of his mouth was terrible. His voice had a steely coldness that pierced through all pretenses.

"Stop this nonsense, Obad," he said sharply. "Don't you realize that you've ruined me? Won't you ever play the man? You know very well that Rapson will never come back, unless the police bring him. You've been the tool of a conspiracy to swindle the public; it was your religious standing that made the swindle possible. No one's called you a thief as yet, but that's what everyone's thinking. I know you're not a thief, but you've been guilty of the grossest negligence. Can't you bring home to yourself the

disgrace of that? You've always been a shirker of responsibility. For years you've let your wife do all the work. And now, when through your silly optimism you've brought dishonor on the family, you still persist in hiding behind shams. I tell you, Obad, you're a coward; you're trying to evade the moral consequences of your actions. If you can't feel shame now, you must be utterly worthless. Your attitude is an offense against every right-thinking man. I didn't set out this morning with the intention of speaking to you like this. But your present conduct and that idiotic interview in the newspapers have made me alter my mind about you. To many men they would prove you nearly as big a rascal as Rapson."

My uncle had sat with his body crouched forward, his knees apart, his hands knitted together, and his eyes fixed on the carpet while my father had been talking. Now that there was silence he did not stir. I watched the bald spot on his head, how the yellow skin crinkled and went tight again as he bunched up and relaxed his brows. He looked so kindly and yet so ineffectual. My father had flayed him naked with his words. He had accused him of not being a man; but that was why I loved him. It was his unworldliness that had made it possible for him to penetrate so far into a child's world. Caroline snuffled on the other side of the keyhole.

My uncle pulled apart his hands and raised his head. "You've said some harsh things, Cardover. You've reminded me about Lavinia; I didn't need to be told that. I may be a fool, but I'm not a scoundrel. I can only say that I'm sorry for what's happened. I was well-meaning; I did it for the best. Is there anything else you want to tell me?"

"There's just this." My father handed him an envelope. "It may help you to do the right thing in paying the investors a little of what's left. Of course you'll have to sell off everything and pay them as much as you can."

"But what is this you've given me?"

"The hundred pounds you gave to Dante and Ruthita at Christmas."

He flushed crimson; then the blood drained away from his hands and face, leaving them ashy gray. His lip trembled, so that I feared terribly he was going to cry with the bitterness of his humiliation.

"But—but it was a gift to them. I didn't expect this. Won't you let them keep it? I should like them to keep it. It'll make so little difference to the whole amount."

"My dear Obad, when will you appreciate the fact that everything you have given away or have, is the result of another man's theft?"

My uncle glanced round the room furtively, taking in the meaning of those words. It had been my father's purpose to make him ashamed; that was amply accomplished now. He huddled back into the sofa, a broken man. He had been stabbed through his affections into a knowledge of reality.

My father beckoned to me and turned. I stretched out my hand and touched my uncle. He took no notice. The sunlight streamed in on the creased bald head, the dust, and the forfeited splendor. Reluctantly I tiptoed out and was met in the hall by the hot indignant eyes of Caroline, accusing me of treachery across the banisters.

CHAPTER X

THE LAST OF THE RED HOUSE

IN after years it became a habit with my father to say grimly that Uncle Obad's Christmas dinner was the most expensive he had ever eaten—it had cost him two thousand pounds. This was the only reference to the unfortunate past that he permitted himself. On calm reflection I think he was a little sorry for the caustic frankness of some of his remarks; he was willing to forget them. Besides, as it happened, one of my uncle's least forgivable offenses—the mentioning of our names to the newspaper men—resulted in an extraordinary stroke of luck.

A week after our visit to Chelsea, my father received a letter. It was from a firm of lawyers and stated that a friend, who had read of our loss, was anxious to provide the money for my education; the only condition made was that he should be allowed to remain anonymous.

At first my father flatly refused to put himself under such an obligation to an unknown person. "One would think that we were paupers," he said; "such an offer may be kindly meant, but it's insulting."

He was so sensitive on the subject that we none of us dared to argue the matter. We considered the affair as closed, and began to consider what walk of business I should enter. Then we discovered that my father had gone off on the quiet and interviewed the lawyers; as a consequence, a second and more pressing letter arrived, stating that the anonymous benefactor would be gravely disappointed if we did not accept. He was childless and had often wished to do something for me. My father's misfortune was his opportunity.

Our curiosity was piqued. Who of our friends or acquaintance was childless? We ran over the names of all possible benefactors—a task not difficult, for we had few friends.

The name of my mother's father, Sir Charles Evrard, was suggested. He fitted the description exactly; the long estrangement which had resulted from my father's elopement supplied the motive for his desire to suppress his personality.

Out of this guess Ruthita wove for me a romantic future, opening to my astonished imagination a career more congenial than any I had dreamt in my boldest moments. Up to this time, save for whispered hints from my grandmother Cardover, no mention had been made of my mother's family. My father's plebeian pride had never recovered from the shock and humiliation of his early years. At first out of jealous purpose, latterly from force of habit and the delicacy which men feel after re-marriage, he had allowed me to grow up in almost entire ignorance of my maternal traditions.

Now that the subject had to be discussed he became obstinately silent to the point of sullenness. The Snow Lady came to the rescue. "Leave him to me," she said; "I know how to manage him, my dear."

She laid it tactfully before him that he had no right to let his personal likes or dislikes prevent me from climbing back into my mother's rank in society. I was my grandfather's nearest kin and, if our surmise proved correct, this might be Sir Charles's first step towards a reconciliation—a step which might end in his making his will in my favor.

Grandmother Cardover was communicated with and instructed to report on the lie of the country. She replied that folks said that old Sir Charles was wonderfully softened. She also informed us that Lord Halloway, the next of kin to myself, had been up to some more of his devilry and was in disgrace with his uncle. This time it was to do with a Ransby bathing-machine man's daughter. Lord

Halloway was my second-cousin, the Earl of Lovegrove's son and heir. His Christian name was Denville; I came to know him less formally in later days as Denny Halloway.

I was packed off to my grandmother, ostensibly for a week's holiday at Ransby—in reality to put our hazard to the test.

Ransby to-day is a little sleepy seaside town. The trade has gone away from it. Every summer thousands of holiday-makers from London invade it with foreign, feverish gaiety; when they are gone it relapses into its contented old-world quiet. In my boyhood, however, it was a place of provincial bustle and importance. The sailing vessels from the Baltic crowded its harbor, lying shoulder to shoulder against its quays, unloading their cargoes of tallow and timber and hemp. Now all that remains is the herring fishery and the manufacture of nets.

Grandmother Cardover's house stood near the harbor; from the street we could see the bare masts of the shipping lying at rest. In the front on the ground-floor was the shop, piled high with the necessities of sea-going travel. There were coils of rope in the doorway, and anchors and sacks of ship's biscuits; a little further in tarpaulin and oil-skin jackets hung from the ceiling, interspersed with smoked hams; and, at the back, stood rows of cheeses and upturned barrels on which ear-ringed sailor-men would sit and chat.

Behind the counter was a door, with windows draped with red curtains. It led into what was called the keeping-room, a cozy parlor in which we took our meals, while through the window in the door we could watch the customers enter. The keeping-room had its own peculiar smell, comfortable and homelike. I scarcely know how to describe it; it was a mixture of ozone, coffee, and baking bread. Out of the keeping-room lay the kitchen, with its floor of red bricks and its burnished pots and pans hung in rows along the walls. It was my grandmother's boast that the floor was so speckless that you could eat a meal off it. Across the courtyard at the back lay the bake-

house, with its great hollow ovens and troughs in which men with naked feet trod out the dough.

Grandmother had never been out of Ransby save to visit us at Pope Lane, and this rarely. Even then, after a fortnight she was glad to get back. She said that Ransby was better than London; you weren't crowded and knew everyone you met. The streets of London were filled with stranger-windows and stranger-faces, whereas in Ransby every house was familiar and had its story.

She carried, strung from a belt about her waist, all the keys of her bins and cupboards. You knew when she was coming by the way they jangled. She was a widow, and perfectly happy. On Sundays she attended the Methodist Chapel in the High Street, with its grave black pulpit and high-backed pews. On week-days she marshaled her sea-captains, handsome bearded men, and entertained them at her table. In spite of younger rivals, who tried to win their patronage from her by cuts in prices, she held their custom by her honest personality. I believe many of them made her offers of marriage, for she was still comely to look at; she refused them as lovers and kept them as friends. She usually dressed in black, with a gold locket containing the hair of her husband, many years dead, hung about her neck. Her hair was arranged in two rows of corkscrew curls, which reached down to her shoulders from under a prim white cap. She had a trick of making them waggle when she wished to be emphatic. She was a good deal of a gossip, was by instinct an antiquary, and had a lively sense of wit which was kept in check by a genuine piety—in short, she was a thoroughly wholesome, capable, loving woman. The type to which she belonged is now quickly vanishing—that of the more than middle-aged person who knows how to grow old usefully and graciously: a woman of the lower-middle class not chagrined by her station, who acknowledged cheerfully that she had her superiors and, demanding respect from others, gave respect ungrudgingly where it was due. She was a shop-keeper proud of her shop-keeping.

That week at Ransby was a kind of tiptoe glory. My

Grannie took me very seriously; she had under her roof a boy who would surely be a baronet, perhaps a lord, and maybe an earl. What had only been an expectation with us was for her a certainty. The floodgate of her reminiscence was opened wide; she swept me far out into the romantic past with her accounts of my mother's ancestry. The Evrards were no upstart nobility; they had their roots in history. She could tell me how they returned from exile with King Charles, or how they sailed out with Raleigh to destroy the Armada. But I liked to hear best about my mother, how she rode into Ransby under her scarlet plumes, on her great gray horse, with her flower face; and how my father caught sight of her and loved her.

I began to understand my father in a new way, entirely sympathetic. He was a man who had tasted the best of life at the first. There was something epic about his sorrow.

These conversations usually took place in the keeping-room at night. The shutters of the shop had been put up. The gas was unlighted. The flames of the fire, dancing in the grate, split the darkness into shadows which groped across the walls. Everything was hushed and cozy. My Grannie, seated opposite to me, on the other side of the fireplace, would bend forward in her chair as she talked; when she came to exciting passages her little gray curls would bob, or to passages of sentiment she would remove her shiny spectacles to wipe her eyes. If she stopped at a loss for the next topic, all I had to say was, "And how did Sir Charles Evrard look, Grannie, when he came to you that first morning after they had run away?"

"He looked, as he has always looked, my dear, an aristocrat."

"But how did he treat you? Wasn't he angry?"

"Angry with a woman! Certainly not. He treated me like a courtly gentleman—with respect. He dismounts and comes into my shop as leisurely as though he had only stepped in to exchange the greetings of the day. He raises

his hat to me as he enters. 'A fine day, Mrs. Cardover,' he says.

" 'A fine day, Sir Charles, but inclined to blow up squally,' says I.

" Then he turns his face away and inquires, 'If it's not troubling you, can I see your son this morning?'

" 'He went to London early,' says I.

" He puts his hand to his throat quickly, as if he were choking. Then he asks huskily, still not looking at me, 'Did he go alone?'

" 'That, Sir Charles, is more than I can say.'

" 'Quite right. Quite right.' And he speaks so quickly that he startles me.

" Then he turns round, trying to smile, and shows me a face all old and pale. 'A very fine day for someone; but it's true what you say, it'll blow up squally later.'

" And with that he leaves me, raising his hat, and rides away."

"And you knew all the time?" I ask.

"We both knew all the time," she replies.

During the daytime we went through the flat wind-swept country on excursions to Woadley Hall. Our hope was that we might meet Sir Charles, and that he would recognize me. Unfortunately, on the afternoon of my arrival he had a hunting accident, and kept the house during all the period of my stay. My nearest approach to seeing him was one evening, when the winter dusk had gathered early; I hid in the shrubbery outside the library and saw his shadow fall across the blind. He seemed to stand near the window listening. We were not more than two yards separated. I wonder, did some instinct, subtler than the five senses, let him know of the starved yearning that was calling to him out there in the dark? How those long watches in Woadley Park stirred up memories, and made my mother live again!

When the week had expired, I returned to Pope Lane. The offer was re-debated and at last accepted. I went back to the Red House and there learnt the fickleness of

popularity. My uncle's downfall had caused me to become a far less exalted person. My influence was gone; a period of persecution threatened. The Bantam alone stood by me; even in his eyes I was a Samson shorn of his glory. The renewed, half-shy interest taken in me by the Creature was a doubtful asset. Our friendship was a coalition of two weaknesses, and resulted in nothing profitable in the way of social strength. He did his best to make things up to me. He was almost womanly in his kindness. Now that Lady Zion was gone he felt a great emptiness in life; he borrowed me that, in some measure, I might fill her place. He told Sneard that he wished to coach me that I might sit for a scholarship at Oxford. Permission was granted, so we both got off prep.

Evening after evening I would spend at his cottage, the lamp lighted and the books spread out on the table. He decided that I was not much good at natural science, and declared that I must specialize in history. He was a genius in his way, and had amazing stores of information. When he overcame his hesitating shyness, he showed himself a scholar of erudite knowledge and intrepid imagination. He had a passion for antiquity that amounted to idolatry, and a faculty which was almost uncanny for making the dead world live again. While he spoke I would forget his shabbiness, his chalk-stained hands, uncouth gestures, and revolting untidiness. He was a magician who unlocked the doors of the storied past; he owned the right-of-way through all men's minds, from Homer to Herbert Spencer. When he spoke of soldiers, his air was bullying and defiant. But it was when he spoke of women that he spoke with his heart. Then, all unaware of what he was doing, he pulled aside the curtains and let me gaze in upon the empty rooms of his life. It was he who pointed out to me that, with rare exceptions, it is not the virtuous but only the beautiful women that the world remembers.

It was odd to think what images of loveliness went to and fro behind that soiled mask of outward personality, in the hidden temples of his brain. The Creature was a

man you had to love or dislike, to know altogether or not to know at all. In that last year and a half at the Red House, when he tapped me on the shoulder and led me away by the revelation of his curious secret charm, I got both to know and to love him.

And yet there was always fear in my friendship. He was queer like his sister before him. Her death seemed to have unbalanced his reason; it was a weakness that grew upon him. He seemed to have lost his power of distinguishing between the present and the imaginary or the past. Often in the cottage he would forget that his sister was not still alive and, rising from the table, would look beyond me as if he saw her, or would go out into the passage and call to her. Nothing in the cottage had been changed since her departure. Her belongings lay untouched, just where she had left them, as though her return was hourly expected.

He fell into the way of imitating her gestures, and humming snatches of her crazy songs. He would tumble over the precipice into the abyss of insanity without warning, in the middle of being rational; and would clamber back just as suddenly, apparently without knowledge of where he had gone. Of one of her songs he was extremely fond. I had often heard Lady Zion sing it as she rode between the hedges, and had been made aware of her approach long before I caught sight of her:—

“All the chimneys in our town
Wake from death when the cold comes down;
Through the summer against the sky
Tall, and silent, and stark they lie—
But every chimney in our town
Starts to breathe when the cold comes down.”

Some safe-guarding astuteness prevented him from showing his weakness at the Red House; and I was too fond of him to tell. To the rest of the boys he was only the grubby, somewhat eccentric little “stinks” master. Nevertheless, sane or insane, it was through the Creature’s

efforts that, after a year of coaching, I won a history scholarship at Lazarus for eighty pounds.

Still, eighty pounds would not carry me to Oxford. It became a worrying problem to my family exactly what my grandfather, if he were my benefactor, had meant by "undertaking the expenses of my education." His generosity might be co-terminous with my school-days. A month after the winning of the scholarship the lawyers wrote, setting our minds at rest and congratulating me on my success in the name of their client. This letter was gratifying in more than a monetary sense—it was a sign that the anonymous friend was keeping a close watch on my doings.

Since the interview at Chelsea there had been no intercourse between my father and Uncle Obad. I had once contrived to see my uncle by stealth, but the first question he had asked me was, did I come with my father's knowledge. When I could not give him that assurance, he had sorrowfully refused to have anything to do with me. At the time I shrank from mentioning the matter to my father; so for a year and a half my uncle and his doings had dropped completely out of my life.

But my treatment of him weighed on my conscience. My last term at school had ended. It was August, and in October I expected to go up to Oxford. With my scholarship and the money the lawyers sent me I should soon be a self-supporting person. Already I thought myself a man. I felt that on the whole my father's quarrel with my uncle was reasonable, but I could not see why I should be made to share it. So one day as I got up from breakfast, I mentioned casually that I was going to run over to Charity Grove.

It was just such another golden morning as the one of ten years earlier, when I had driven for the first time across London behind Dollie. What a big important person the Spuffler had seemed to me then! How wonderful that he, a grown-up, should take so much trouble to be friendly to a little chap! Then my mind wandered back

over all his repeated kindness—all that he had stood for in the past as a harbor of refuge from the stormy misunderstandings of childhood. He and the Creature, both failures and generally despised, were two of the best men that I had ever met. Whatever his faults, he still was splendid.

I came to the Christian Boarding House, and passed up the driveway shut in with heavy evergreens. Caroline, tousled of hair, all loose ends, girt about her middle with a sackcloth apron, was on her knees bricking the steps. She did not recognize me. The Mistress was out shopping, she said, but the Master was in the paddock. "Ah, yes," I thought, "feeding the fowls."

I passed through the decayed old rooms, with their heavy shabby furniture, so evidently picked up cheap at auctions; then I passed out through the French windows into the cool garden, where sunshine dappled the lawn, struggling with difficulty through the crowded branches. At the gate into the paddock I halted. There he was with a can of water in his hand, fussing in and out his coops and hutches, so extremely busy, as though the future of the world depended on his efforts. I suppose he was still evolving that strain of perpetually laying hens, The Spreckles, which was to bring him fame and fortune.

I called to him, "Uncle Obad."

When he had recovered from his emotion, I soon found that the old fellow had long ago emerged from all personal sense of disgrace with his usual corklike irrepressibility. He chatted with me cheerily, calling me, "Old chap," just as though nothing painful had happened to separate us. On being ousted from Chelsea, he had immediately dropped back, with something like a sigh of relief, into his former world of momentous trifles—philanthropy and fowls. "We lived at a terrible pace, old chap. It was wearing us out. We couldn't have stood it."

He spoke as if the abdication of his brief period of affluence had been voluntary. I scented here one of his spuffling explanations to his neighbors for his precipitate return to the boarding-house.

On inquiry I found that all his philanthropic societies had forgiven and taken him back. After sulking a while and flirting with various paid secretaries, they had agreed for economy's sake to let bygones be bygones. They had been unable to find any other person who would serve them as loyally without salary, and who at the same time was able to offer up such beautiful extempore prayers. The list of their contributors had afforded Rapson his happiest hunting-ground. Procuring my uncle's services for nothing was their only way of getting anything back.

"And what about Rapson?" I asked. "Do you still believe in him?"

He shook his head dolefully. "I begin to lose faith, Dante; I begin to doubt."

"But have you heard from him since he went away?"

"Never a word."

He hesitated and then he said, "There's Kitty, you know. He didn't do the straight thing by her. No, I'm afraid Rapson wasn't a good man."

At mention of Kitty I pricked up my ears; I had often wondered about her. "What had Kitty to do with him?" I asked. "Were they engaged?"

"No, unfortunately."

"In love?"

"Perhaps."

"Married?"

"I wish they had been. After he'd left her, she was awfully cut up. I did what I could for her. You remember that hundred pounds?"

"My father—at Chelsea—the Christmas present?"

"Yes. I couldn't keep it. I gave it to her."

"You always have to be giving something," I said.

We were sitting on an upturned barrow in the paddock when this conversation took place. I thought how characteristic of Uncle Obad that was—to be helping others at a time when he himself was most in need of help. But his kindness knew no seasons. Then I began, as a very

young man will, to think of Kitty, and, because of her frailty, to picture her through a haze of romance.

"Where's Kitty now?" I asked.

"She's in a photographer's at Oxford. She serves behind a counter. But, come, you've not told me yet what you think of my fowls."

CHAPTER XI

STAR-DUST DAYS

THE walls of the garden had fallen. Childhood was ended and with it all those absurd, aching fears lest I should never be a man and lest time might be a stationary, unescapable present, with no trap-doors giving access to the future. The experiment of life had begun in earnest, and the adventure.

That first October night of my residence at Oxford is forever memorable. Before leaving Pope Lane I had been led aside by my father. He had taken it for granted that I was now capable of a man's follies and had warned me against them. Somehow his assumption that I had it in my choice to become a Don Juan warmed my heart; it impressed me as a tribute to my manhood—a tacit acknowledgment that I was a free agent. Free at last!

I did not understand one-tenth part of all that he hinted at. But his presumption that I did understand seemed to me a form of compliment. To ask for an explanation was a heroism of which I was not capable. So I left home clad in the armor of ignorance to do battle with the world.

Ruthita wanted to accompany me to the station. I would not let her. She was weepy in private; I knew that in public she would be worse. I had inherited my father's dread of sentiment and his fear lest other people should construe it as weakness.

At Paddington I met the Bantam; we were entering the same college and traveled up together. We chose our places in a "smoker" by way of emphasizing to ourselves our emancipation. We tried to appear ordinary and at ease; beneath our mask of carelessness we felt delight-

fully bold and bad. In our carriage were three undergraduates, finished products of indifferent haughtiness. Though no more than a year our seniors, they loaded their pipes and puffed away without fear or furtiveness. They affected to be unaware of us. They were infinitely bored in manner and addressed the porters in a tone of lackadaisical, frigid tolerance. What masterfulness! And yet one term of Oxford would give us the right to be like that!—we, who so recently had been liable to be told that children must be seen and not heard. The assurance of these youthful men imperiled our courage.

As we neared Iffley, the domes and spires of the Mecca of dreamers swam up. The sky was pearl-colored without a cloud. Strewn throughout its great emptiness was the luminous dust of stars. All the tinsel ambitions which had lately stirred me were forgotten as the home of lost causes claimed me. I grew large within myself as, in watching its advance behind the river above the tree-tops, I merged my personality in this vision of architectural romance. Leaning against the horizon, stretching up and up, out of the murk of dusk and the blood-red decay of foliage, it symbolized for me all the yearning after perfection and the passionate desire for freedom that had always lain hidden in my heart. I wanted to be like that—the thing that gray pyramided stone seen at twilight can alone express—wise, unimpassioned, lovely, immutable.

We came to a standstill in the shabby station, which of all stations is probably the best beloved.

“Thank the Lord, we’re here at last.”

In a hansom, with a sporting cabby for our driver, we rattled through the ancient lamp-lit town where the ghosts of the dead summer rustled and reddened against the walls. Past the Castle we sped, through Carfax, down the High, past Oriel and Christ Church till we drew up with a jerk at Lazarus. Whatever we had suffered in the train in the way of lowered opinion of self was now made up to us; the servility of the College porter and scouts was eloquent of respect. We were undoubtedly persons of im-

portance. If we wanted further proof of it, this awaited us in the pile of communications from Oxford tradesmen, notified beforehand of our coming, humbly soliciting our patronage.

The Bantam's room and mine were next door to one another in Augustine's Quad; fires were burning in the grates to bid us welcome. The scout, who acted as guide, seized the opportunity to sell us each a second-hand tin bath, a coal-scuttle, and a kettle at very much more than their first-hand prices. We felt no resentment. His deferential manner was worth the extra.

Just as we had commenced unpacking, the bell began to toll. We slipped on our gowns and followed the throng into a vaulted, dimly-lighted hall, where we dined at long tables off ancient silver, and had beer set before us. Surely we were men!

That night the Bantam and I sat far into the small, cold hours of the morning; there was no one to worry us to go to bed. When the Bantam had left, I lay awake in a state of bewildered ecstasy. I had become aware in the last ten hours of my unchartered personality. I realized that my life was my own to command, to make or mar. As the bells above the sleeping city rang out time's progress, all the pageant of the lads of other ages, who had come up to Oxford star-eyed, as I had come, passed before me. When the withered leaves tapped against the walls, I could fancy that it was their footfall. They had come with a chance equal to mine; at the end of a few years they had departed. Some had succeeded and some had failed. Of all that great army which now stretched bivouacked throughout eternity, only the latest recruits were in sight. The scholar-monks, the soldier-saints, the ruffian-students of early centuries, the cavaliers, the philosophers, and the statesmen, together with the roisterers of the rank and file, were all equally and completely gone.

In the silence of my narrow room, with the flickering fire dying in the hearth, there brooded over me the shadowy darkness of the ages. What religion does for some men,

for me the gray poetry of this poignant city accomplished. I had become aware that from henceforth the ultimate responsibility for my actions must rest forever with myself. I was strangely unafraid of this knowledge.

They were dim dawn-days that followed, when the air was filled with star-dust—neither with suns, nor moons, nor stars, only with the excitement of their promise. My world was at twilight, blurred and mysterious; only the huge design was clearly discernible—the cracks and imperfections were concealed from me, shrouded in dusk. I lived in a land of ideals, drawing my rules of conduct from the realism of the classics—a realism which even to the Greeks and Romans was only an aspiration, never a practice. Existence had for me all the piquant fascination which comes of half-knowledge—the charming allurements, leaving room for speculation, which the glimpse of a girl's face has at nightfall. It was an age when all things seemed possible, because all were untested.

Gradually, out of the wilderness of strange faces, some became more familiar than others; little groups of friends began to form. The instinctive principle on which my set came together was enthusiastic rebellion against convention and eager curiosity concerning existence. One by one, without appointing any place of meeting, we would drift into some man's room. This usually occurred about eight in the evening, after dinner in hall. The lamp would be left unlighted; the couch would be drawn near the fire; then we would commence a conversation which was half jesting and half confessional.

Under the cloak of laughing cynicism we hid a desperate purpose. We wanted to know about life. We sought in each new face to discover if it could tell us. We had nothing to guide us but the carefully prepared disclosures which had been vouchsafed us in our homes. We had risen at a bound into a man's estate, and still retained a boy's knowledge. We realized that life was bigger, bolder, more adventurous, more disastrous than we had reckoned. Why was it that some men failed, while others

had success? What external pressures caused the difference in achievement between Napoleon, for instance, and Charles Lamb? Who was responsible for our varying personalities? Where did our own responsibility begin, and where did it end?

The problems we argued predated the Decalogue, yet to us they were eternally original and personal. We attacked them with youthful insolence. The authority of no social institution was safe from our irreverence. We accepted nothing, neither religion, nor marriage; we had to go back to the beginning and re-mint truth for ourselves. Our real object in coming together was that we might pool our scraps of actual experience, and out of these materials fashion our conjectures.

There was one topic of inexhaustible interest. It permeated all our inquiry—*woman*. We knew so little about her; but we knew that she held the key opening the door to all romance. What gay cavaliers we could be in discussing her, and how sheepish in the presence of one concrete specimen of her sex—especially if she were beautiful, and not a relative!

All the adventures we had ever heard of seemed now within our grasp. Woman was the great unknown to us. We knew next to nothing of the penalties—only the romance.

Little by little the boldest among us, recognizing that talk led nowhere, began to put matters to the test. The same shy restraint that had made me afraid of Fiesole when she had tempted me to kiss her, made me an onlooker now. A saving common sense prompted me to await the proof of events. I acted on instinct, not on principle. The difference between myself and some of my friends was a difference of temperament. Perhaps it was a difference between daring and cowardice. There are times when our weaknesses appear to be virtues, preserving us from shipwreck. I was capable of tempestuous thoughts; while they remained thoughts I could clothe them with idealism and glamor. But I was incapable of impassioned acts; their

atmosphere would be beyond my control—the atmosphere of inevitable vulgarity which results from contemporary reality. My observation of unrestraint taught me that unrestraint was ugly. In short, I had a pagan imagination at war with a puritan conscience.

In my day, there was no right or wrong in undergraduate Oxford—no moral or immoral. Every conventional principle of conduct which we had learnt, we flung into the crucible of new experience to be melted down and, out of the ordeal, minted afresh.

We divided ourselves into two classes: those who experimented and those who watched. There was only one sin in our calendar—not to be a gentleman. To be a gentleman, in our sense of the word, was to be a sportsman and to have good manners.

In our private methods of thought we were uninterfered with by those in authority. The University's methods of disciplining our actions were, and still are, a survival of mediævalism. If an undergraduate was seen speaking to a lady, he had to be able to prove her pedigree or run the risk of being sent down. At nine o'clock Big Tom rang; ten minutes later every college-door was shut and a fine was imposed for knocking in or out. In the streets the proctors and their bulldogs commenced to go the rounds. Until twelve a man was safe in the streets, provided he appeared to be innocently employed and wore his cap and gown. Knocking into college after twelve was a grave offense.

If a man observed these rules or was crafty, he might investigate life to his heart's content. Public opinion was extremely lenient. Conduct was a purely personal matter as long as it did not inconvenience anybody else. If a man had the all-atoning social grace, and was careful not to get caught in an incriminating act, though everybody knew about it from his own lips afterwards, he was not censured.

My cousin, Lord Halloway, had been a Lazarus man. Oxford still treasured the memory of his amorous exploits.

He had been a good deal of a dare-devil and was regarded as something of a hero; he inspired us with awe, for, despite his recklessness, he had played the game gaily and escaped detection. The impression that this kind of thing created was that indiscretions were only indiscreet when they were bungled. Punishment seemed the penalty for discovery—not for the sin itself. Naturally it was the foolish and less flagrant sinners who got caught. For instance, there was the Bantam.

The first term the Bantam watched and listened. There were occasions when he was a little shocked. When Christmas came round, having no home to go to, he kept on his rooms in college, and spent the vacation in residence. I returned to Pope Lane, and found that the womanliness of Ruthita and the Snow Lady had a sanitary effect. The wholesome sweetness of their affection, after the hot-house discussions of a group of boyish men, came like a breath of pure air. I fell back into the old trustfulness. I recognized that society had secret restraints and delicacies, a disclosure of the motives for which was not yet allowable; at the proper season life would explain itself.

When college re-assembled I noticed a change in the Bantam. He was soulful and sentimental—he took more pains with his dressing. He was continually slipping off by himself; when he returned he volunteered no information as to the purpose of his errand. When the eternal problem of woman was discussed, he smiled in a wise and melancholy manner. If he contributed a remark, it was not a guess, but had the air of authoritative finality. One night I tackled him. "What have you been up to, Bantam? You know too much."

He twisted his pipe in his mouth pensively. "She's the sweetest little girl in the world."

He would not tell me her name. He had pledged her his word not to do that. There was a reason—she was working, and she belonged to too high a rank in society to work. She wished to remain obscure, until she could re-instate herself. She was a Cinderella who would one



day emerge from poverty into splendor. The Bantam said his emotions were almost too sacred to talk about. Nevertheless, he meandered on with his mystery from midnight to three o'clock. She was a lady and terribly persecuted. He had come to her rescue just at the identical moment when a good influence was most needed. All through the Christmas Vac he had acted the big brother's part, shielding her from temptation. She was lovely—there lay the pity of it.

I pointed out that there were ten thousand ways of flirting with girls, and that this was the most dangerous. His white knighthood was affronted by that word *flirting*. He became indignant and said I was no gentleman.

As time went on, acquaintance after acquaintance would drop in to see me, and would hint gravely at a deep and romantic passion which the Bantam had imparted to them alone. When I informed them that I also was in his confidence, they would repeat to me the same vague story of persecuted loveliness, but always with embellishments. By and by, the embellishments varied so irreconcilably that I began to suspect that they referred to more than one girl.

Most of us were in love with love in those days; we were all quite certain that an incandescent purifying passion lay ahead of us. It might knock at our door any hour—and then our particular problem would be solved. This hope was rarely mentioned. To one another we strove to give the impression of being cynical and careless. Yet always, beneath our pose of flippancy, we were seeking the face pre-destined to be for us the most beautiful in all the world. For myself, I was feverishly eager in its quest. I would scour the green-gray uplands of the Thames, telling myself that she might lie hidden in the cheerful quiet of some thatched farm. Every new landscape became the possible setting for my individual romance. I lived each day in expectancy of her coming. Sometimes at nightfall I would pause outside a lighted shop-window, arrested by a girl's profile, and would pre-

tend to myself that I had found her. That was how Rossetti found Miss Siddall; perhaps that was how it would happen to myself. One thing was certain: whenever and wherever I found her, whether in the guise of shop-girl, dairy-maid, or lady, for me the golden age would commence. I stalked through life on the airy stilts of an æsthetic optimism.

Ah, but the Bantam, he was all for doing! If he could not find the love he wanted, he would seize the next best. Yet he would never admit that he was in love. He deceived himself into believing that he acted on the most altruistic motives. If others misunderstood him, it was because they were of grosser fiber. Other men, doing the things he did, laughingly acknowledged their rakishness; he, however, considered himself a self-appointed knight-errant to ladies in distress. He became involved in endless entanglements. It was by appealing to his higher nature with some pitiful story, that his transient attractions caught him.

I never knew a man so unfortunate in his genius for discovering lonely maidens in need of his protection. He always meant to be noble and virtuous, but his temperament was not sufficiently frigid to carry him safely through such ticklish adventures. He never learnt when to leave off; his fatal and theatric conception of chivalry continually led him on to situations more powerfully tempting. It would be easy to explain him by saying that he was a sentimental ass. But so were we all. The Bantam came to his ruin because he was lonely, because he had no social means of meeting women who were his equals, and because he was too kind-hearted; but mainly because he attributed to all women indiscriminately a virtue which unfortunately they do not all possess.

He sinned accidentally and therefore carelessly—not wisely, but too well. A man like Lord Halloway sinned of set purpose and laid his plans ahead; so far as society's opinion of him was concerned he came off comparatively scatheless. The worst that was ever said of him was that

he was a gay dog. Women even seemed to like him for it. I suppose he intrigued their fancy, and made them long to reform him. From this I learnt that the gaping sins of a gay dog are more easily forgiven than the peccadilloes of a sentimental donkey.

In the Easter Vacation of our first year at Oxford, the Bantam stayed at Putney. In the same house was an actress, very beautiful and more sorely used by the world than even the first girl. In the summer-time there was a widow at Torquay. In the beginning of our second year of residence there was a bar-maid at Henley. After that they followed in rapid succession. Wherever he went he found some woman starving for his sympathy. They were all ladies and phenomena of beauty, to judge from his accounts.

When he came to make confession to me, it was a little difficult to follow which particular lady he was talking about. He never mentioned them by name, and seemed to try to give the impression that they were one composite person.

One evening I got him with his back to the wall. "Bantam, who is this Oxford girl—the first one you got to know about?"

Then he admitted that she was a shop-girl. I knew what that meant: some of the Oxford tradesmen engaged girls for the prettiness of their faces, that they might attract custom by flirting with the undergrads. Little by little I narrowed him down in his general statements till I had guessed the shop in which she worked.

"Is she a good girl?" I asked.

Instead of taking offense, he answered, "Dante, the thought of her goodness often makes me ashamed of myself."

It was evident, though he would not admit it, that this affair at least was serious.

"Then why does she stay there?"

"She can't help herself."

"Why can't she help herself?"

"She's an orphan and has a living to earn. She's afraid to get out of a situation."

"But what good are you doing her?"

"Helping her to keep up her courage by letting her know that one man respects her."

"Don't you think she may get to expect more than that?"

"Certainly not. Why should she?"

"Just because girls do," I said. "Do you write her letters?"

"Sometimes."

"What do you write about?"

He wouldn't tell me that. Next day I went down to the shop to investigate matters. Since the Bantam wouldn't listen to sense, I intended to hint to the girl the danger of what she was doing. Of course she could never marry him; but I was morally certain that that was what she was aiming at.

The shop was a stationer's. I had chosen an hour in the afternoon when it was likely to be empty, everyone being engaged in some form of athletics. I entered and saw a daintily gowned woman with her back turned towards me. She was all in white. Her waist was of the smallest. She had a mass of honey-colored hair. She swung about at sound of my footstep.

"Why, Kitty, of all people in the world! I didn't expect to find you here."

"As good as old times," she said. "I've often seen you pass the window, but I thought you wouldn't want to know me."

"And why not?"

"Because of what happened."

"Rapson?"

She flushed and hung her head. I wondered if she meant what I thought she meant.

I hated to see her sad; she looked so young and pretty. I began to ask her what she was doing.

"Doing! Minding shop, remembering, growing old, and

earning my living. It's just horrid to be here, Dante. I have to watch you 'Varsity men having a good time—and once I belonged to your set. And they come in and stare at me, and pay me silly compliments—and I have to smile and pretend I like it. That's what I'm paid for. They don't know how I hate them. When they have their sweet-hearts and sisters up, they walk past me as though they never knew me."

"But are they all like that?"

She smiled, and I knew she loved him. When she spoke her voice trembled. "There's one of them is different."

"Kitty, he's the one I came to talk about."

With instinctive foreknowledge of the purpose of my errand, her face became tragic. "His father's in India," I explained. "From what I hear of him he's very proud. If the Bantam made a marriage that could in any way be regarded as imprudent, he'd cut him off. He'd be ruined. You know how it would be; the world would turn its back on him."

"What do we care about the world?" she said. "The world's a coward."

It was wonderful how coldly practical I could become in dealing with another man's heart affairs—I, who spent my time dreaming of the most extraordinarily unconventional marriages.

"The world may be a coward, Kitty, but you have to live in it. Besides, are you sure that the Bantam really cares for you? Have you told him everything?"

She stared into my eyes across the counter with frightened fascination. I knew that I was acting like a brute and I despised myself. I had hardly meant to ask her the last question—it had slipped out. While we gazed at one another there drifted through my memory all the scenes of that day at Richmond—the gaiety of it, and the hunger with which she had clutched me to her as we punted back in the dark. I understood what this little bit of love must mean to her after her experience of disillusion.

"No, I have not told him. I daren't. I'm afraid to lose

him. Oh, Dante, don't tell him; it's my one last chance to be good."

"But you've got to tell him, Kitty. If his love's worth anything, he'll forgive you. He'd be sure to find out after marriage."

"I don't care about marriage," she whispered desperately.

"Even then, you ought to tell him."

A customer came into the shop. We tumbled from our height of emotion. It was another example of how reality makes all things prosaic. She had to compose herself, and go and serve him. He had come to admire her and showed a tendency to dawdle. His purchase was the excuse for his presence. I had an opportunity to watch her—how charmingly fresh she looked and how girlish. And yet she was three years older than myself—that seemed incredible. At last the customer went.

"Kitty, I feel I've been a horrid beast to you—it's so often like that when one speaks the truth. I didn't mean to hurt you. I want to see you happy. I'll not interfere. You must do what you feel to be right about it." And with that I left her.

The Bantam was rowing in the college crew that summer. What with training, going to bed early, and keeping up with his work, I saw little of him. The night before the races he came into my room. He looked brilliantly healthy—lean and tanned.

"Are you alone?"

"You can see I am. What's the trouble?"

He sank into a chair and grinned at me. "It's all up. I've been an awful ass."

"How?"

"I wrote two letters; one to the widow at Torquay and the other to the actress. They were nice friendly letters, but far too personal. I put 'em in the wrong envelopes."

"And they've sent them back with bitter complaints against your infidelity. Poor old Bantam!"

"They haven't. They're keeping them as proof. They've both struck out the same line of action and talk about

a breach of promise suit. They're both coming to see me to-morrow, and they're sure to meet. There'll be a gay old row, and I shall get kicked out of Lazarus."

I whistled.

"You may well whistle," he said, ridiculously puckering his mouth; "it's a serious affair. Here have I been trying to be decent to two women, and they're going to try to make me out a kind of letter-writing Bluebeard. I know quite well I've written silly things to them that could be construed in a horribly damaging manner. I only meant to be cheery, you know, but I see now that there've been times when I've crossed the boundary of mere friendship. They can both make a case against me I suspect and so can all the other girls. Once the thing leaks into the papers, they'll all swoop down like a lot of vultures to see what they can get."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I can run away to-night without leaving any address. That would leave the crew in the lurch; we'd get bumped every night on the river—so I can't do that. I can stop and face it out—let my pater in for all kinds of expense in the way of damages, and get sent down. Or I can marry one of 'em, and so shut all the others' mouths. It isn't money they're wanting—it's me as a husband. Isn't it a gay old world?"

He pushed his hands deep into his trouser-pockets and thrust out his legs. He didn't seem adequately desperate—in fact he gave the impression of being glad this thing had happened. I was puzzling over what I ought to say to him, when it occurred to me that I hadn't offered any expression of sympathy; I told him I was awfully sorry.

"Needn't be. You see, there's only one girl I greatly care about, and she's just all the world. She had a mishap some years back with a cad—she only told me a month ago, and because of it she refused to marry me. She's got it into her head that I'm too good for her. Well, now I can prove to her that it's the other way about."

The Bantam ruffled his hair. He spoke with genuine

feeling; this was quite different from any of his former confessions. He moistened his lips nervously, and turned away his eyes from me. "There are some girls," he said, "who never need to be forgiven. Whatever they've done and whatever they're doing, doesn't matter. They seem always too pure for us men."

I leant forward and took his hand. I felt proud of him. "I'll stand by you, old chap. How can I help?"

"By being awfully decent to these two women to-morrow. Take 'em out on the river and keep 'em quiet. Drug 'em with flattery. They're both of them immensely good-looking. P'raps if you treat 'em well, they'll be ashamed to make a row. Then, when Eights' Week is over and the crew doesn't want me any longer, I'll slip up to London, and establish a residence, and get married."

As he was going out of the room I called him back. "What's the name of the girl you're going to marry?"

"Kitty," he whispered below his breath, as though it were a word too sacred to mention.

The widow from Torquay arrived next morning; so did the actress from Putney. I let each one suppose that the other was my near relative, and never left them for a moment together, lest they should discover their error. I gave them separately to understand that their troubles would be satisfactorily settled. I made much of the rigors of training, which compelled the Bantam to absent himself. They didn't meet him until after they had seen him racing, by which time he had become a kind of hero to them. I saw them safely off at the station by different trains—so the crash was averted. When Eights' Week was ended the Bantam vanished, without explanation to the college. A month later I attended his wedding.

Kitty had asked permission to invite one guest—she wouldn't tell us his name. When we three had assembled in the little Church of Old St. Mary's, Stoke Newington, who should come fussing up the aisle but my uncle, the Spuffler. He wore a frayed frock-coat; the end of his handkerchief was hanging out of his tail-pocket, as usual.

All through the service he gave himself such important airs that the clergyman took it for granted that the bride was his daughter.

We jumped into a couple of hansoms and drove down to Verrey's to lunch. The Bantam said he knew he couldn't afford it, but he was determined to have one good meal before he busted. We had a private room set apart for us. The Spuffler tasted the best champagne he had drunk since his fiasco. It made him reflective. He kept on telling us that life was a switchback—an affair of ups and downs. The Bantam cut him short by proposing a toast to all the ladies he hadn't married. And I sat and stared at Kitty, with her cornflower eyes and sky-blue dress, and wondered where my eyes had been that I hadn't married her myself.

We went to the Parks and took a boat on the Serpentine. It was there that the Bantam let his bomb burst: he was sailing on the *Celtic*, via New York, for Canada. He felt sure his father would disown him for having spoilt his Oxford opportunities, so he was going to start life afresh in a land where no one would remember.

In the autumn, when I returned to Lazarus, I had an opportunity to judge how the world treats breakers of convention. No one had a good word to say for the Bantam. Everybody was eager to disclaim him as his friend—he had married a shop-girl. Yet Halloway, who sinned cavalierly without twinge of conscience or attempt at reparation, was spoken of, even by persons who had never known him, with a kind of tolerant, admiring affection. So much for what this taught me of social morality. Playing safe, and not ethical right or wrong, was the standard of conventional righteousness.

Star-dust days were drawing to an end. The grim, inevitable facts of life were looming larger and nearer. Romance was slowly giving way before reality. It was the last year at Oxford for most of the men in my set. Conversations began to take a practical turn, as to how a living might be earned. For myself, I listened with a languid interest. These discussions did not concern my

future. I expected that my grandfather would continue my allowance. I should not be forced to sell myself by doing uncongenial, remunerative kinds of work. I should have time to mature. I wanted to make a study of the Renaissance. About twenty years hence I should publish a book; then I should be famous. Meanwhile I should collect my facts, and probably enter Parliament as member for Ransby.

It was wonderful how bravely confident we were. We gazed into the future without fear or tremor. We all knew that we were sure of success. Already we were picking out the winners—the naturally great men, who would arrive at the top of the tree with the first effort. It was a belief among us that genius was nothing more than concentrated will-power. Then something happened which startled me into a novel display of energy.

Ever since leaving the Red House, the Creature had written me once a week, usually on a Sunday, with clock-work regularity. One Monday I went to the porter's lodge for my mail and missed his letter. The following morning, glancing down the paper, my eye was attracted by a headline which read, TRAGIC DEATH OF A SCHOOLMASTER. The news-item announced the death of Mr. Murdoch, science master of the Red House. It appeared that the boys had gone down to the laboratory to attend the experimental chemistry class. On opening the door they had been driven back by a powerful smell of gas, but not before they had caught a glimpse of Mr. Murdoch fallen in a heap upon the floor. When the room was entered it was quite evident that the death was not accidental. Every burner in the room was full on, and the ventilators were stopped with rags.

Some days later I received a legal letter informing me that the Creature had left a will in my favor. His total estate amounted to three hundred pounds. I was requested to call at the lawyer's office. I got leave of absence from my college and went to London. There I learnt that at the time that the will had been made, a little over five years

ago, the value of the estate had been a thousand pounds. Of this I had already received over seven hundred, remitted to me by his lawyers from time to time according to his instructions. He had originally saved the money in order that he might provide for his sister in the event of his dying first. On her death, he had executed the present will, making me his heir.

So Sir Charles Evrard was not the author of my prosperity! The disappointment of the discovery robbed me for an instant of all sense of gratitude. I felt almost angry with the Creature for having been the innocent cause of all this building of air-castles. This was the second time that fortune had led me on to expect, only to trick me when the future seemed secure. The uncertainty of everything unnerved me. Life seemed to pucker its brows and stare down at me with a frown. All the money that had been spent on my education had taught me nothing immediately useful—and now I had a living to earn.

Luckily, just about this time, it was suggested to me that, after I had taken my Finals, I should enter for some of the history fellowships in the autumn. It was expected that I would gain an easy First; if I did that, I had a fair chance of winning a fellowship at my own college.

Now that my fool's paradise had melted into nothingness, I felt the spur of necessity, and commenced to work strenuously. Gradually a higher motive than the mere hope of reward began to actuate my energy. I wanted to be what the Creature had hoped for me. Now that he was gone, he became very near to me. He was always haunting my memory. He had robbed himself that he might give me my chance. I felt humbled that I should have spent his money with so free a hand, while he had been living in comparative poverty. I could picture just how he looked that morning when the boys burst into the laboratory. His hands were stained with chalk. His uncombed hair fell back from his wrinkled forehead. He was wearing the same old clothes—the tweed jacket and gray flannel trousers

—that I knew so well. Probably he looked both tired and dirty, and a little disreputable.

I reproached myself for the shortness of my letters to him. I saw now, in the light of after events, how I might have been a strength to him. He had given me everything; I had given him nothing. His fineness of feeling had led him to prevent my gratitude. Never by the slightest hint had he left me room to guess that I was beholden to him. And now he was beyond reach of thanks.

I recalled how I had teased him as a youngster, and had courted popularity at his expense. When I was most angry against myself, I would drift back into the class-room where the boys were baiting him, and would hear him making his peace-offering, "Penthil, Cardover? Penthil, Buzzard? Want a penthil?" And then, in spite of indignation, I had to laugh.

When Finals came on I won my First and in the autumn gained a history fellowship at Lazarus. It was worth two hundred pounds a year. It allowed me ample time to travel and was tenable for seven years, on the condition that I did not marry.

BOOK III
THE GARDEN WITHOUT WALLS

*And behind them a flame burneth: and
the land is as the garden of Eden be-
fore them, and behind them a desolate
wilderness.*

CHAPTER I

I MEET HER

It was June and wind was in the tree-tops. All the world was rustling and birds were calling.

For the past seven months, since the winning of my fellowship, I had been over-working and making myself brain-sick with thought. I was twenty-three, and had arrived at "the broken-toy age" when a young man, having pulled this plaything of a universe to pieces, begins to doubt his own omniscience—his capacity to put it together. The more I sought help from philosophies, the more I came to see that they were all imperfect. No one had yet evolved a theory which had not at some point to be bridged by faith—that beautiful optimism which is nothing less than the hearsay of the heart. I was all for logic these days.

So, when I heard the June wind laughing in the trees, I tossed my books aside. I left my doubts all disorderly upon the shelves to grow dusty, and ran away. I would seek for the garden without walls. Having failed to find it in libraries, I would search for it through the open country. I had only two certainties to guide me—that I was young, and that the world was growing lovelier every day.

I came down to quaint little Ransby, perched high and red above the old sea-wall. Life was taken so much for granted there. No one inquired into its why or wherefore. Everything that happened was accepted with a quiet stoicism, as "sent from God." When the waves rumbled on the shore, they said the sea was talking to itself. When a crew sailed out and never returned, they said "God took them." When times were bad, they looked back and re-

membered how times were worse before. No one ever really died there, for in the small interests of a quiet community nothing was forgotten—all the characteristic differences and shades of personality were treasured in memory, and so the dead lived on. Life for them was an affair of compensations. "If there weren't no partin's, there'd be no meetin's," my grandmother used to say. And death was explained after the same simple fashion. Every pious Ransbyite believed that heaven would be another Ransby, with no more storms and an empty churchyard.

I traveled down from London by an afternoon train. Shortly after six we struck the Broads, or inland waterways, which now narrow into rivers, now widen into lakes, flowing sluggishly through fat marshes to the sea. On the left hand as we flashed by, one caught glimpses of the spread arms of windmills slowly turning, pumping meadows dry, or jutting above gray sedges the ochre-colored sails of wherries plodding like cart-horses from Ransby up to Norwich. Startled by the clamor of our passage, a lonely heron would spring up and float indignantly away into the distant quiet. Now we would come to a field of wheat faintly yellowing in the summer sunshine. Between green-gold stalks would flash the scarlet of the Suffolk poppy. Across the desecrated silence we hurled the grime and commotion of cities, leaving an ugly blur of gradually thinning smoke behind.

The evening glow was beginning. Picked out in gold, windows of thatched cottages and steeples of sleeping hamlets burnt for an instant splendid in the landscape. A child, warned of our approach, clambered on a stile, and waved; laborers, plodding homeward with scythes across their shoulders, halted to watch us go by. We burst as a disturbing element into the midst of these rustic lives; in our sullen hurry, they had hardly noticed us before we had vanished.

With the country fragrance of newly-mown hay there began to mingle the tar and salt of a seaport. We swayed across the tressed bridge, where the Broads met the har-

bor. Ozone, smell of fish and sea-weed assailed our nostrils. Houses grew up about us. Blunt red chimneys, like misshapen thumbs, jabbed the blue of the horizon; above them tall masts of ships speared the sky. With rush and roar we invaded the ancient town, defiling its Dutch appearance of neatness, and affronting with our gadabout swagger its peaceful sense of home-abiding. We came to a standstill in the station; all was clatter and excitement.

The visitors' season was just commencing. The platform was crowded with Londoners greeting one another. Drawn up on the other side of the platform, parallel with the train, was a line of cabbies, most of whom were standing up in their seats, shouting and gesticulating. They had a touch of the sea about them—a weatherbeaten look of jolliness.

As I got out, my eye was attracted to a little girl who was climbing down from a neighboring compartment. She was unlike any English child—she lacked the sturdy robustness. My attention was caught by the dainty faeriness of her appearance. She wore a foamy white muslin dress, cut very short, with spreading flounces of lace about it. It was caught up here and there with pink baby-bows of ribbon. Her delicate arms were bare from the elbow. She was small-boned and slender. Her skirt scarcely reached to her knees, so that nearly half her tiny height seemed to consist of legs. She had the slightness and moved with the grace of a child-dancer escaped from a ballet. But what completed her baby perfection was the profusion of flaxen curls, which streamed down from her shoulders to her waist. She saw me looking at her and laughed up with roguish frankness.

Having secured my luggage, I was pushing my way out of the station through the long line of visitors and porters, when I saw the child standing bewildered by herself. In the crowd she had become separated from whoever was taking care of her. I spoke to her, but she was crying too bitterly to answer. Setting down my bags, I tried to comfort her, saying that I would stay with her till she was



found. Suddenly her face lit up and she darted from my side. I had a hurried vision of a lady pushing her way towards her. While she was stooping to take the little girl in her arms, I made off as quickly as I was able. Like my father, I detested a scene, and had a morbid horror of being thanked.

How good it was to smell the salt of the sea again. I passed up the harbor where the fishing-fleet lay moored against the quay-side, and sailormen, with hands deep in trouser-flaps, leant against whatever came handiest, pulling meditatively at short clay pipes. The business of the day was over. Folk were tenacious of their leisure in Ransby; they had a knack, peculiarly their own, of filling the evening with an undercurrent sense of gaiety. Though townsmen, they were villagers at heart. When work was done, they polished themselves up and sat outside their houses or came into the streets to exchange the news of the day. I turned from the harbor and passed down the snug quiet street in which stood the house with CARDOVER painted above the doorway.

As I approached, the bake-house boy was putting the last shutter into place against the window. I entered the darkened shop on tiptoe, picking my way through anchors, sacks of ships' biscuit, and coils of rope, till I could peer through the glass-panel of the door into the keeping-room. I loved to surprise the little old lady with the gray corkscrew curls and rosy cheeks, so that for once she might appear undignified. But, as I peered through, I met her eyes.

"Why, Dante, my boy," she cried, reaching up to put her arms round me, "how you have grown!"

I was always a boy to her; she would never let herself think that I had ceased to grow, for then I should have ceased to be a child.

We sat down to a typically Ransby meal, which they call high-tea. There were Ransby shrimps and Ransby bloaters on the table; everything was of local flavor, and most of it was home-made. "You can't get things like

them in Lun'non," Grandmother Cardover said, falling back into her Suffolk dialect.

That night we talked of Sir Charles Evrard. Rumor proclaimed that Lord Halloway had finally ruined his chances in that direction by his latest escapade. It concerned a pretty housemaid at Woadley Hall, and the affair had actually been carried on under Sir Charles's very nose, as one might say. The girl was the daughter of a gamekeeper on the estate and——! Well there, my Grannie might as well tell me everything!—there was going to be a baby. All that was known for certain was that Mr. Thomas, the gamekeeper—a 'ighly respectable man, my dear—had gone up to the Hall with a whip in his hand and had asked to see Master Denny. The old Squire, hearing him at the door, had gone out to give him some instructions about the pheasantry. Mr. Thomas had given him a piece of his mind. And Sir Charles, having more than he could conveniently do with, had made a present to Denny Halloway of a bit of his mind. After which Master Denny had left hurriedly for parts unknown. It was said that he had returned to Oxford, to read for Holy Orders as a sort of atonement. It was my grandmother's opinion that the marriage-service wasn't much in his line.

So we rambled on, and the underlying hint of it all was that I had come to Ransby in the nick of time to make hay while the sun was shining.

"Grannie, you'll never get me worked up over that again," I told her.

"Well but, if his Lordship don't inherit, who's goin' to?" she persisted. "I tell you, Dante, he's got to make you his heir—he can't help it. The whole town's talking about it. Sir Evrard's bailiff hisself was in here to-day and I says to him, 'Mr. Mobbs, who's going to be master now at Woadley Hall when the dear old Squire dies?' And he answers me respectful-like, 'It don't do to be previous about such matters, Mrs. Cardover; but if you and me was to speak out our minds, I daresay we should guess the same.' 'Is Sir Charles as wild with Lord Hal-



loway as folks do say?' I asks him. Like a prudent man he wouldn't commit hisself to words; but he throws up his hands and rolls his eyes. Now what d'you think of that? If you knew Mobbs as I know him, you'd see it was a sign which way the wind is blowing."

I was trying to think otherwise. I had banished this expectation from my mind and wasn't anxious to court another disappointment.

"If it happens that way, it will happen that way," said I.

But my grandmother wasn't in favor of such indifferent fatalism. She loved to picture me in possession of Woadley. She commenced to describe to me all its farmlands and broad acres. She spoke so much as if they were already mine that at last I began to dream again. So we rambled on until at five minutes to midnight the grandfather clock cleared its throat, getting ready to strike.

"Lawks-a-daisy me," she exclaimed, "there's that clock crocking for twelve! How you do get your poor old Grannie on talking!"

We lit our candles and climbed the narrow stairs to bed. Outside my bedroom-door she halted. I wondered what else she had to tell me. Holding her candle high, so that its light fell down upon her laughing face, she made me a mocking courtesy, saying, "Good-night, Sir Dante Card-over."

Next morning I was up early. As I dressed I could smell the bread being carried steaming out of the bakehouse. Looking out of my window into the red-brick courtyard I could see men's figures, white with flour-dust, going to and fro. The morning was clear and sparkling, as though washed clean by rain. The sun was dazzling and the wind was blowing. From the harbor came the creaking of sails being hoisted, and the cheery bustle of vessels getting under way. Of all places this was home. My spirits rose. I laughed, remembering the cobwebs of theories which had tangled up my brain. Nothing seemed to matter here, save the wholesome fact of being alive.

After breakfast I stepped out into the street and wan-

dered up toward the harbor. The townsmen knew me and greeted me as I went by. I caught them looking after me with a new curiosity in their gaze. I began to wonder whether I had made some absurd mistake in my dressing. I grew uncomfortable and had an insane desire to see what kind of a spectacle my back presented. I tried to use shop-windows as mirrors, twisting my neck to catch glimpses of myself. Then there occurred to me what my grandmother had said to me on the previous night. So it *was* true, and all the town was talking about me!

As I approached the chemist shop at the top of the road, Fenwick, the chemist, was sunning himself in the doorway.

"Why, Mr. Cardover!" he exclaimed, stepping out on to the pavement and seizing my hand with unaccustomed effusiveness. Then, lowering his voice, "Suppose you've heard about Lord Holloway?"

I nodded.

"It's lucky to be you," he added knowingly. "But, there, I always did tell your Grannie that luck would turn your way."

I passed on through the sunshine in a wild elation. What if it were true this time? I asked myself. What if it were really true?

Ransby is built like a bent arm, jutting out into the sea, following the line of the coast. At the extreme point of the elbow, where I was now standing, is the wooden pier, on which the visitors parade. Running from the elbow to the shoulder is the sheltered south beach and the esplanade, given up to visitors and boarding-houses. These terminate in the distance in a steep headland, on which stands the little village of Pakewold. On the other side of the pier is the harbor, entering or departing out of which fishing vessels and merchantmen may be seen almost any hour of the day. From the elbow to the finger tips, running northward, is the bleak north beach, gnawed at by the sea and bullied by every wind that blows. Here it is that most of the wrecks take place. The older portion of the town, climbing northward from the harbor,

overhangs it, scarred and weather-beaten. Where the town ends, seven miles of crumbling gorse-grown cliff continue the barricade.

Separating the town from the north beach, stretch the denes—a broad strip of grassy sand, on which fishing-nets are dried. Parallel with the denes is the gray sea-wall; and beyond the wall a shingle beach, low-lying and defended at intervals by breakwaters. Here the waves are continually attacking: on the calmest day there is anger in their moan. From far away one can hear the scream of pebbles dragged down as the waves recede, the long sigh which follows the weariness of defeat, and the loud thunder as the water hurls itself in a renewed attack along the coast. On the denes stands a lighthouse, warning vessels not to come too close; for, when the east wind lashes itself into a fury, the sea leaps the wall and pours across the denes to the foot of the town, like an invading host. A vessel caught in the tide-race at such a time, is flung far inland and left there stranded when the waves have gone back to their place. Facing the denes, lying several miles out in the German Ocean, are a line of sand-banks; between them and the shore is a channel, known as the Ransby Roads, which affords safe anchorage to vessels. Beyond the Roads and out of sight, lies the coast of Holland.

I turned my steps to the northward, passing through the harbor where groups of ear-ringed fisher-folk were unloading smacks, encouraging one another with hoarse, barbaric cries. I stopped now and then to listen to the musical sing-song conversation of East Anglia, so neighborly and so kindly. Here and there mounds of silver herring gleamed in the morning sunshine. The constant sound of ropes tip-tapping as the breeze stirred them, sails flapping and water washing against wooden piles, filled the air with the energy and adventure of sturdy life.

The exultation of living whipped the wildness in my veins. As I left the harbor, striking out across the denes, I caught the sound of breakers—the long, low rumble of

revolt. Girls were at work, their hair tumbled, their skirts blown about, catching up nets spread out on the grass beneath their feet and mending the holes. Some of them were singing, some of them were laughing, some of them were silent, dreaming, perhaps, of sailor-lovers who were far away.

As I advanced, I left all human sounds behind. The red town, piled high on the cliff, grew dwarfed in the distance. I entered into a world of nature and loneliness. Larks sprang from under my feet and rose into the air caroling. Overhead the besom of the wind was busy, sweeping the sky. From cliffs came the shy, old-fashioned fragrance of wall-flowers nestling in crannies. Yellow furze ran like a flame through the bracken. Far out from shore waves leapt and flashed, clapping their hands in the maddening sunshine. My cheeks were damp and my lips were salt with in-blown spray. It was one of those mornings of exultation which come to us rarely and only in youth, when the joy of the flesh is roused within us, we know not why, and every nerve is set tingling with health—and the world, as seen through our eyes, clothes itself afresh to symbolize the gay abandon of our mood.

The fluttering of something white, low down by the water's edge, caught my attention. Out of sheer idleness I became curious. It was about a quarter of a mile distant when I first had sight of it. Just behind it lay the battered hull of an old wreck, masts shorn away and leaning over on its side. A sea-gull wheeled above the prow, flew out to sea and returned again, showing that it had been disturbed and was distressed.

As I approached, I discovered the white thing to be the stooping figure of a child; by her hair I recognized her. Her skirts were kilted up about her tiny waist and she was bare-legged. I could see no one with her, so I waited till she should look up, lest I should frighten her. Then, "Hulloa, little 'un," I shouted. "Going to let me come and play with you?"

She spread apart her small legs, like an infant Napoleon, and brushed back the curls from her eyes. Her cheeks were flushed with exertion. She looked even prettier and more faery than she had on the previous night.

"Why, you ith the man what found me!" she cried.

She made such speed as she could across the pebbles to greet me. It was hard going for her bare little feet. When she came opposite to me, she halted with a solemn childish air of dignity. "I want to fank you," she said, "and tho doth Vi."

She stood gazing at me shyly. When I bent down to take her hand in mine, she pursed her mouth, showing me what was expected.

I asked her what she was playing. She shook her curls, at a loss for words. "Jest thomething," she said, and invited me to come and join.

I took her in my arms to save her the rough return journey. She showed no fear of me. Soon we were chatting on the lonely beach, firm friends, quite gaily together. She showed me the channel she had scooped out, leading into the miniature harbor. Every time the surf ran up the shore the harbor filled with water. In the basin was a piece of wood, which floated when the surf ran in, and stranded when it receded.

"What's that?" I asked her.

"That's our thip."

"What's the name of our ship?"

"I fordet—it's the big thip in what we came over."

"Who's we?"

"Why, me and Vi."

We set to work to make the harbor wider, going on our knees side by side. I thought of a fine plan—to start the ship at the beginning of the channel, that so it might ride in on the in-rush of the water. The little girl was delighted and leant over my shoulder, brushing my face with her blown about hair, and clapping her hands as she watched the success of the experiment. In the excitement of the game, we had forgotten about everyone but our two selves,

when we heard a voice calling, "Dorrie, darling! Dorrie, darling! Are you all right?"

I turned round, but could see no one—only the lonely length of the shore and the black wreck blistering in the wind and sunshine.

"Yeth, I'm all right," piped the little girl.

Then she explained to me, "That wath Vi."

"And who are you?" I asked her.

"I'm Dorrie."

For me the zest had gone out of the game. I kept turning my head, trying to catch a glimpse of the owner of the voice. It had sounded so lazy and pleasant that I was anxious to see what Vi looked like; but then I was not sure that my company would prove so welcome to a grown-up as it had to Dorrie. To run away would have looked foolish—as though there were something of which to be ashamed; and then there was nowhere to run to in that wide open space. Yet my intrusion was so unconventional that I did not feel comfortable in staying.

A slim figure in a white sailor dress came out from the wreck. She had been bathing, for she wore neither shoes nor stockings, and her hair was hanging loose about her shoulders to dry. She started at sight of me, and seemed, for a moment, to hesitate as to whether she should retire. I rose from my knees, holding Dorrie's hand, and stood waiting.

I could not help gazing at her; we looked straight into one another's eyes. Hers were the color of violets, grave and loyal. They seemed to stare right into my mind, reading all that I had thought and all that I had desired. Her face was of the brilliant and transparent paleness that goes with fair complexions sometimes. In contrast her lips were scarlet, and her brows delicately but firmly penciled. Her features were softly molded and regular, her figure upright and lithe. She appeared brimful of energy, a good deal of which was probably nervous. And her hair was glorious. It was flaxen like Dorrie's; the salt of the sea had given to it a bronzy touch in the shadows. She was

neither short nor tall, but straight-limbed and superbly womanly. She possessed Dorrie's own fragile daintiness. The likeness between them was extraordinary; I judged them at once to be sisters. As for her age, she looked little more than twenty.

She stood gazing down on me from the sullen wreck, with La Gioconda's smile, incarnating all the purity of passion that I had ever dreamt should be mine. "Gold and ivory, with poppies for her lips," was the thought that described her.

Dorrie cut short our silence. Letting go my hand, she stumbled up the beach, explaining the situation in her lisping way. "Deareth, thith gentleman hath been playing with me. He'th the man what found me yetherday."

Noticing that neither of us uttered a word, she turned on me reproachfully. "I thought you wath kind," she said. "Come thith minute, and thpeak to Vi."

Her air of baby imperiousness made us smile. That broke the ice.

She placed her arm about Dorrie, hugging her against her side. As I came up to the wreck, she held out her hand frankly. "This is very unconventional," she said, "but things sometimes happen this way. I was so sorry you wouldn't stop to let me thank you yesterday. I was hoping we would meet again."

It seemed quite natural to sit down beside this stranger. Usually in the presence of women I was tongue-tied and had to rack my brains to think what to say. When the opportunity to escape came, I always took it, and spent the next hour in kicking myself for having behaved like a frightened boy. On this occasion it was quite otherwise. Sprawled out in the shadow of the wreck, gazing up into her girlish face while she cuddled Dorrie to her, I found myself talking with a fearlessness and freedom which I was not aware of at the time.

"You were bathing?"

She shook out her hair. "Looks like it?"

"But you shouldn't bathe here, you know. It's dangerous. The south beach is the proper place."

"I'm rather a good swimmer. I'm not afraid."

"That doesn't matter. You oughtn't to do it. You might get drowned. I'm awfully serious. I wish you wouldn't."

She seemed amused at my concern for her. Yet I knew she liked it. Her eyes were saying to me, "Oh, you nice, funny boy! You've known me less than an hour. If I were to drown, what difference would it make to you?"

She looked down at Dorrie. "If Vi were to go out there, and sink beneath a wave, and never come back again, would Dorrie mind?"

"You won't," said Dorrie; "don't be thtupid."

We talked about a good many things that morning as the wind blew, and the waves broke, and the sun climbed higher. I wanted to find out who she was, so that I might make certain of meeting her again.

"Do you live in Ransby?" I asked.

"No. We only arrived yesterday. I never was in England till a week ago. We've been traveling on the Continent. I wanted a place in which to be quiet. I heard someone in the hotel at which we stayed in London talking about Ransby. They said it was old-world and bracing—that was why I came."

"I've never been out of England in my life," I said; "I'd like to break loose some time."

"Where would you go?"

When we began to talk of foreign countries, she amazed me with her knowledge. She seemed to have been in every country of Europe except Russia. Last winter, she told me, she had spent in Rome and the spring in Paris. She always spoke as if she had been unaccompanied, except for Dorrie. It struck me as strange that so young and beautiful a woman should have traveled so widely without an escort or chaperon of any kind. I was striving to place her. She spoke excellent English, and yet I was certain she was not an Englishwoman. For one thing, her man-

ner in conversation with a man was too spontaneous and free from embarrassment. She had none of that fear of talking about herself which hampers the women of our nation; nor did she seek to flatter me and to hold my attention by an insincere interest in my own past history. She had an air of self-possession and self-poise which permitted her to make herself accessible. I longed to ask her to tell me more about herself, but I did not dare. We skimmed the surface of things, evading one another's inquisitiveness with veiled allusions.

The child looked up. "Dorrie's hungry," she said plaintively.

Pulling out my watch I discovered that it was long past twelve. Making the greatest haste, I could not get back to my grandmother's till lunch was over.

"You needn't go unless you want," said Vi. "I've enough for the three of us. It was Dorrie and I who delayed you; so we ought to entertain you. That's only fair."

Dorrie wriggled her toes and clambered over me, insisting that I accept the invitation. And so I stayed.

They disappeared for ten minutes inside the wreck; when they came out they had completed their dressing. Vi had piled her hair into a gold wreath about her head. She was still hatless, but her feet were decorously stockinged and shod in a shiny pair of high-heeled slippers.

When the meal was ended, I had told myself, I ought to take my departure; but Dorrie gave me an excuse for stopping. She curled herself up in my arms, saying she was "tho thleepy." I could not rise without waking her.

When the child no longer kept guard between us, we began to grow self-conscious. In the silences which broke up our whispered conversation, we took slow glances at one another and, when we caught one another's eyes, looked away sharply. I thought of the miracle of what had happened, and wondered if the same thought occupied her mind. Here were she and I, who that morning had been nothing to one another; by this afternoon every other interest had become dwarfed beside her. I knew nothing of

her. Most of the words which we had interchanged had been quite ordinary. Yet she had revealed to me a new horizon; she had made me aware of an unsuspected intensity of manhood, which gave to the whole of life a richer tone and more poignant value.

She took her eyes from the sea and looked down at Dorrie. "You hold her very tenderly. You are fond of children."

"I suppose I am; but I didn't know it until I met your little sister."

A warm tide of color spread over her pale face and throat. She leant over me and kissed Dorrie. When the child opened her eyes she said, "Come, darling, it's nearly time for tea. We must be going."

I helped her to gather up her things, taking all the time I could in the hope that she would ask me to accompany her.

She offered me her hand, saying, "Perhaps we shall meet again."

"I'm sure I hope so. Ransby is such a little place."

"Yes, but our movements are so uncertain. I don't know how long we may be staying."

"At any rate we've had a good time to-day."

"Yes. You have been very kind. I'm sure Dorrie will remember you. Good-by."

I watched them grow smaller across the sands, till they entered into the shadow of the cliff. I had a mad impulse to pursue them—to follow them at a distance and find out where they lived. How did I know that they had not vanished forever out of my life? I called myself a fool for not having seized my opportunities, however precipitately, while they were mine.

The wreck looked desolate now; all the romance had departed from it. The long emptiness of the shore filled me with loneliness. As I walked homeward, I strove to memorize her every tone and gesture. Their memory might be all that I should ever have of her. I was mortally afraid that we should never meet again.

CHAPTER II

I MEET HER AGAIN

NEXT morning I walked along the north beach in the hope that I might catch sight of her. I was sure that she had shared my quickening of passion; it was because she had felt it and been frightened by it, that she had wakened Dorrie and hurried so abruptly away. I was sufficiently vain to assure myself that only the timidity of love could account for the sudden scurry of her flight.

With incredible short-sightedness, I had allowed them to leave me without ascertaining their surname. My only clue, whereby I might trace them, was the abbreviated forms of their Christian names. Dorrie probably stood for Dorothy or Dorothea; Vi for Vivian or Violet. Directly after breakfast I had studied the visitors' list in *The Ransby Chronicle*, hoping to come across these two Christian names in combination with the same surname. My search had been unrewarded, for only the initials of Christian names were printed and the V's and the D's were bewilderingly plentiful.

On approaching the wreck I became oppressed with a nervous sense of the proprieties. I was ashamed of intruding myself again. If she were there, how should I excuse my coming? That attraction to her was my only motive would be all too plain. I had at my disposal none of the social cloaks of common interests and common acquaintance, which serve as a rule to disguise the primitive fact of a man's liking for a woman. The hypocrisy of pretending that a second meeting in the same place was accidental would be evident.

When I got there my fears proved groundless; nervous-

ness was followed by disappointment. The shore was deserted. I called Dorrie's name to make my presence known; no answer came. Having reconnoitered the wreck from the outside, I entered through a hole in the prow where the beams had burst asunder. Then I knew that Vi had been there that morning. The surface of the sand which had drifted in had been disturbed. It was still wet in places from her bathing and bore the imprint of her foot-steps, with smaller ones running beside them which were Dorrie's. I must have missed them by less than a hour.

Turning back to Ransby, I determined to spend the rest of the day in searching. Surely she must be conscious of my yearning—sooner or later, even against her inclination, it would draw her to me. Even now, somewhere in the pyramided streets and alleys of the red-roofed fishing-town, her steps were moving slower and her face was looking back; presently she would turn and come towards me.

All that morning I wandered up and down the narrow streets, agitated by unreasonable hopes and fears. Ransby has one main thoroughfare: from Pakewold to the harbor it is known as the London Road; from the harbor to the upper lighthouse on the cliff it is known as the High Street. Leading off from the High Street precipitously to the denes are winding lanes of many steps, which are paved with flints; they are rarely more than five feet wide and run down steeply between gardens of houses. They make Ransby an easy place in which to hide. As I zig-zagged to and fro between the denes and the High Street by these narrow passages, I was tormented with the thought that she might be crossing my path, time and again, without my knowing.

At lunch my grandmother inquired whether I had been to Woadley Hall. She had noticed how preoccupied I had been since my arrival, and attributed it to over-anxiety concerning my prospects with Sir Charles.

"The best thing you can do, my dear," she said, "is to go along out there this afternoon. I'm not at all sure that you oughtn't to make yourself known at the Hall. At

any rate, you've only got to meet Sir Charles and he'd know you directly. There's not an ounce of Cardover in you; you've got your mother's face."

Falling in love is like committing crime; it tends to make you secretive. You will practise unusual deceptions and put yourself to all kinds of ridiculous inconvenience to keep the sweet and shameful fact, that a woman has attracted you, from becoming known. My grandmother had set her heart on my going to Woadley. There was no apparent reason why I shouldn't go. It would be much easier to make the journey, than to have to concoct some silly excuse for not having gone. So, with great reluctance, I set out, having determined to get there and back with every haste, so that I might have time to resume my search for Vi before nightfall.

I had been walking upwards of an hour and was descending a curving country lane, when I heard the smart trotting of a horse behind. The banks rose steeply on either side. The road was narrow and dusty. I clambered up the bank to the right among wild flowers to let the conveyance go by. It proved to be a two-wheeled governess-car, such as ply for hire by the Ransby Esplanade. In it were sitting Dorrie and Vi. Vi had her back towards me but, as they were passing, Dorrie caught sight of me. She commenced to shout and wave, crying, "There he ith. There he ith." They were going too fast on the downgrade to draw up quickly, and so vanished round a bend. Then I heard that they had halted.

As I came up with the conveyance, Dorrie reached out her arms impulsively and hugged me. She was all excitement. Before anything could be said, she began to scold me. "Naughty man. I wanted you to play thips with me thith morning, like you did yetherday."

I was looking across the child's shoulder at Vi. Her color had risen. I could swear that beneath her gentle attitude of complete control her heart was beating wildly. Her eyes told a tale. They had a startled, frightened, glad expression, and were extremely bright.

"I should have liked to play with you, little girl," I said, "but I didn't know where you were staying. I looked for you this morning, but couldn't find you."

"Dorrie seems to think that you belong to her," said Vi, in her laughing voice. "She's a little bit spoilt, you know. If she wants anything, she wants it badly. She can't wait. So, when we didn't run across you, she began to worry herself sick. If we hadn't found you, I expect there'd have been an advertisement in to-morrow's paper for the young man who played ships with a little girl on the north beach."

"You won't go away again," coaxed Dorrie, patting my face.

"Where are you walking?" asked Vi.

"To Woadley."

"That's where we're going, so if you don't mind the squeeze, you'd better get in and ride."

A governess-car is made to seat four, but they have to be people of reasonable size. The driver's size was not reasonable. Good Ransby ale and a sedentary mode of life had swelled him out breadthwise, so that there was no room left on his side of the carriage except for a child; consequently I took my seat by Vi.

The driver thought he knew me, but was still a little doubtful in his mind. With honest, Suffolk downrightness, he immediately commenced to ask questions.

"You bain't a Ransby man, be you, sir?"

"I'm a half-and-half."

"Thought I couldn't 'a' been mistaken. I've lived in Ransby man and boy, and I never forgets a face. Which 'alf of you might be Ransby?"

"I'm Ransby all through on my parents' side, but I've lived away."

"Why, you bain't Mr. Cardover, be you—gran'son to old Sir Charles?"

"You've guessed right."

"Well, I never! And to think that you should be goin' to Woadley! Why, I knew your Ma well, Mr. Cardover.

The gay Miss Fannie Evrard, we called 'er. Meanin' no disrespect' to you, sir, I was groom to Miss Fannie all them years ago, before she run away with your father. She were as nice and kind a mistress as ever a man might 'ope to find. It's proud I am to meet you this day."

As we bowled along through the leafy country, all shadows and sunshine, he fell to telling me about my mother, and I was glad to listen to what he had to say. The story had been told often before. By his inside knowledge of the elopement, he had acquired that kind of local importance which money cannot buy. It had provided him with the one gleam of lawless romance that had kindled up the whole of his otherwise dull life. According to his account, the marriage would never have come off, unless he had connived at the courting. My mother, he said, took him into her confidence, and he was the messenger between her and my father. He would let my father know in which direction they intended to ride. When they came to the place of trysting, he would drop behind and my mother would go on alone. He pointed with his whip to some of the meeting-places with an air of pride. He was godfather, as you might say, to the elopement. After it had taken place, Sir Charles had discovered his share in it, and had dismissed him. The word had gone the round among the county gentry—he had never been able to find another situation. So he had bought himself a governess-car and pony, and had plied for hire. "And I bain't sorry, sir," he said. "If it were to do again, I should be on the lovers' side. I'm only sorry I 'ad to take to drivin' instead o' ridin'; it makes a feller so 'eavy."

Vi laughed at me out of the corners of her eyes. She had listened intently. I felt, without her telling me, that this little glimpse into my private history had roused her kindness. And the affair had its comic side—that this mountain of flesh sitting opposite should be my first ambassador to her, bearing my credentials of respectability.

"Ha' ye heerd about Lord Holloway?" he inquired.

I nodded curtly. Encouraged by my former sympathetic attention, he failed to take the intended warning.

"Thar's a young rascal for ye, for all 'e 'olds 'is 'ead so 'igh! Looks more'n likely now that you'll be the nex' master o' Woadley. Doan't it strike you that way, sir?"

When I maintained silence, he carried on a monologue with himself. "And 'e war goin' to Woadley, he war. And I picks 'un up by h'axcident like. And I war groom to 'is ma. Wery strange!"

But there were stranger things than that, to my way of thinking: and the strangest of all was my own condition of mind. A golden, somnolent content had come over me, as though my life had broken off short, and commenced afresh on a higher plane. Every motive I had ever had for good was strengthened. The old grinding problems were either solved or seemed negligible. I saw existence in its largeness of opportunity, and I saw its opportunity in a woman's eyes. It was as though I had been color-blind, and had been suddenly gifted with sight so penetrating that it enabled me to look into exquisite distances and there discern all the subtle and marvelous disintegrations of light.

As the car swung round corners or rattled over rough places, our bodies were thrown into closer contact as we sat together, Vi and I. Now her shoulder would lurch against mine; now she would throw out her hand to steady herself, and I would wonder at its smallness. I watched the demure sweetness of her profile, and how the sun and shadows played tricks with her face and throat. The fragrance of her hair came to me. I followed the designed daintiness of the little gold curls that clustered with such apparent carelessness against the whiteness of her forehead. I noticed the flicker of the long lashes which hid and revealed her eyes. How perishable she was, like a white hyacinth, or a summer's morning—and how remotely divine.

And the tantalizing fascination of it all was that I must be restrained. She might escape me any day.

In a hollow of the country from between the hedges, Woadley crept into sight. First we saw the gray Norman tower of the church, smothered in ivy; then the thatched roofs of the outlying cottages; then the sun-flecked whiteness of the village-walls, with tall sunflowers and hollyhocks peeping over them.

As we passed the churchyard the driver slowed down. "Thar's the last place your father met 'er, Mr. Cardover, before they run away. It war a summer evenin' about this time o' the year, and they stayed for upwards o' an hour together in the porch. She'd told old Sir Charles that she war goin' to put flowers on 'er mawther's grave. Aye, but she looked beautiful; she war a fine figure o' a lady."

I told him I would alight there. He was closing the door, on the point of driving on, when I said to Vi, "Wouldn't you like to get out as well? The church is worth a visit."

She gave me her hand and I helped her down. The governess-car went forward to the village inn.

They had been scything the grass in the churchyard and the air was full of its cool fragrance. Dorrie ran off to gather daisies in a corner where it still stood rank and high.

We walked up the path together to the porch and tried the door. It was locked. We turned away into the sunlight, where dog-roses climbed over neglected graves and black-birds fluttered from headstones to bushes, from bushes to the moss-covered surrounding walls.

It was Vi who broke the pleasant silence. "I hope you didn't mind the man talking."

"Not at all. I expect I should have told you myself by and by."

"Your mother must have been very beautiful. I like to think of her. All this country seems so different now I know about her; it was so impersonal before. Was—was she happy afterwards?"

I told her. I told her much more than I realized at the time. So few people had ever cared to hear me talk about her, and for all of them she was something past—

dead and gone. My grandmother talked of her as a lottery-ticket; so did the Spuffler; at home we never mentioned her at all. Yet always she had been a real presence in my life. I felt jealous for her; it seemed to me that she must be glad when we, whom she had loved, remembered her with kindness.

Dorrie came back to us with her lap full of flowers. Seeing that we were talking seriously, she seated herself quietly beside us and commenced to weave the flowers into a chain.

The gate creaked. Footsteps came up the path. They paused; seemed to hesitate; came forward again. Behind us they halted. Turning my head, I saw an erect old man, white-haired, standing hat in hand, his back toward us, regarding a weather-beaten grave.

We rose, instinctively feeling our presence irreverent. My eye caught the name on the headstone of the grave:

MARY FRANCES EVRARD

BELOVED WIFE OF SIR CHARLES EVRARD

OF WOADLEY HALL

The old gentleman put on his hat, preparing to move away. Recognizing our intention to give him privacy, he turned and bowed with stiff, old-fashioned courtesy.

I gazed on him fascinated. It was the first time I had seen my grandfather. His eyes fell full on my face.

His was one of the most remarkable faces I have ever gazed on. He was clean shaven; his skin was ashy. His features were ascetic, boldly chiseled and yet sensitively fine. They seemed to remodel themselves with startling rapidity to express the thought that was passing in his mind. The forehead was bony, high, and wrinkled. The nose was large-nostriled and aquiline. The eye-brows were shaggy; beneath them burnt sparks of fire, steady and almost cruel in their scorching penetration. From the nostrils to the corners of the mouth two heavy lines cut deep

into the flesh, creating an expression of haughty contemplation and aloof sadness. The mouth was prominent, full-lipped, and almost sensual, had it not been so delicately shaped. The chin was long, pointed, and sank into the breast. It was an actor's face, a poet's face, a rejected prophet's face, according to the mood which animated it. When the lines deepened into sneering melancholy and the corners of the large mouth drooped, it became almost Jewish. The strong will that was always striving to cast the outward appearance into an expression of immobile pride, was continually being thwarted by the man's quivering, abnormal capacity to feel and to be wounded.

He stared at me in troubled amazement. Yearning, despairing tenderness fought its way into his eyes; for an instant, his whole expression relaxed and softened. He had recognized my mother in me and was remembering. He made a step towards me. Then his face went rigid again. The skin drew tight over the cheek-bones. Setting his hat firmly on his head, he turned upon his heel. At the gate he looked back once, against his will. Then he passed out resolutely and vanished down the road.

Twilight was gathering as we drove back to Ransby. Rays of the sun crept away from us westward through the meadows, like golden snakes. Vi and I were silent—the presence of the driver put a constraint upon us.

He had a good deal to say, for he had warned all the village of my arrival, and all the village, furtively from behind curtained windows, had watched Sir Charles's journey to and from the churchyard.

It had been pleasant at the inn to hear myself addressed as "Miss Fannie's son." The windows of the low-ceilinged room in which we had had our tea, faced out on the tall iron gates which gave entrance to the park. Far up the driveway, hidden behind elms, we had just caught a glimpse of Woadley Hall. And all the while we were eating, the broad-hipped landlady had stood guard over us, talking about my mother and the good old days. She had mistaken Vi for my wife at first; in speaking to Dorrie she had re-

ferred to me as "your Papa." Up to the last she had persisted in including Vi and Dorrie in her prophecies for my future. She never doubted that Vi and I were engaged. She assured us that she 'oped to see us at the 'All one day, and a 'andsome couple we would make.

At the time we had been abashed by her conversation, and had drunk our tea in flustered fashion with our eyes in our cups. We had hated this big complacent person for her clumsy, interfering kindness. But now, as the little carriage threaded its way through dusky lanes, her errors gave rise to a pleasant train of imaginings. I saw Vi as my wife—as Lady Cardover, mistress of Woadley Hall. I planned the doings of our days, from the horse-back ride in the early morning to the quiet evenings together by the cozy fire. And why could it not be possible?

Country lovers, unashamed, with arms encircling one another, drew aside to let us pass, as our lamps flashed down the road. Night birds were calling. Meadowsweet and wild thyme spread their fragrance abroad. As the wind blew inland, between great silences, it carried to our ears the moan of the sea. While twilight hovered in the open spaces Dorrie, since no one talked to her, kept up an under-current song:—

"How far is it to Babylon?
Three score miles and ten.
Can I get there by candlelight?
Ah yes,—and back again."

As night crept on, the piping little voice grew indistinct and murmurous, like a bee humming; the fair little head nodded and sank against the arm of the bulky driver. Vi leant forward to lift her into her lap; but I took Dorrie from her. With the child in my arms, for the first time the desire to be a father came over me. In thinking of what love might mean, I had never thought of that.

We entered Ransby at the top of the High Street and drew up outside an old black flint house. Vi got out first

and rang the bell. When the door opened, I put Dorrie into her arms. I bent over and kissed the sleeping child. Vi drew back her head sharply; my lips had passed so near to hers. We faced one another on the threshold. The light from the hall, falling on her face, showed me that her lips were parted as though she had something that she was trying to get said. Then, "Good-night," she whispered, and the door closed behind her.

I crossed the street and wandered to and fro, watching the house. All the front was in darkness; her rooms must be at the back. I was greedy for her presence; if I could only see her shadow pass before a window I would be content. With the closing of the door, she seemed to have shut me out of her life. There was so much to say, and nothing had been said.

I turned out of the High Street down a long dark score, toward the beach. Walls rose tall on either side. The salt wind, hurrying up the narrow passage, struck me in the face and caused the gas-lamps to quiver. Far down the tunnel at the end of the steps lay a belt of blackness, and beyond that the tossing lights of ships at sea.

Reaching the Beach Road, I passed over the denes. The town stretched tall across the sky, like a shadowy curtain through which peered golden eyes. The revolving light of the lighthouse on the denes pointed a long white finger inland, till its tip rested on the back of Vi's house. I fancied I saw her figure at the window. The finger swept on in a circle out to sea, leaving the town in darkness. The upper-light on the cliff replied, pointing to the place where I was standing, making it bright as day. If she were still at the window, she would be able to see me as I had seen her. Next time her window was illumined she had vanished. I watched and waited; she did not return.

I roamed along the shore towards the harbor, purposeless with desire. The sea, like a blind old man, kept whimpering to itself, trying to drag itself up the beach, clutching at the sand with exhausted fingers.

Wearied out with wandering, I turned my steps home-

ward. The shop looked so dark that I was ashamed to ring the bell lest they had all retired. I tapped on the shutters, and heard a shuffling inside; my grandmother opened the door to me. She was in her dressing-gown and a turkey-red petticoat. The servant had been in bed some hours.

In the keeping-room I found a supper spread. Instead of being annoyed, she was bubbling over with excitement. She could not sit down, but stood over my chair while I ate; she was sure something wonderful had happened.

"So you saw Sir Charles, my boy, and he recognized you! Tell me everything, chapter and verse, with all the frills and furbelows."

I had not much that I could tell, but I spread it out to satisfy her.

"And what did you think of 'im?" she asked. "Isn't he every inch the aristocrat?"

"Yes. But why is he so dark? There are times when he looks almost Jewish."

"Why, my dear, that's 'cause he's got gipsy-blood. His mother was one of the Goliaths. Didn't your father ever tell you that? Seems to me he don't tell you nothing. You have to come to your poor old Grannie to learn anything. Why, yes, old Sir Oliver Evrard, his father, your great-grandfather, fell in love with a gipsy fortune-teller and married 'er. Ever since then the gipsies have been allowed to camp on Woadley Ham. They do say that it was the wild gipsy streak that made your mother do what she did. But there—that's a long story. It'll keep. We'd better go to bed."

CHAPTER III

FATE

I COULD not understand Vi. It would seem that she was trying to avoid me. If I met her in the street she was usually driving and, while she bowed and smiled, never halted. I took many strolls by her house, hoping to catch her going in or out. I think she must have watched me. Once only, when she thought the coast was clear, I came upon her just as she was leaving the house. She saw me and flushed gloriously; then pretended that she had not seen me and re-entered, closing the door hurriedly behind her.

After that I gave up my pursuit of her. It seemed not straightforward—too much like spying. I kept away from the places she was likely to frequent. Wandering the quays, where there were only sailors and red-capped Britany onion-sellers, I racked my brains, trying to recall in what I had offended. I felt no resentment for Vi's conduct. It never occurred to me that she was a coquette. I thought that she might be actuated by a woman's caution, and gave her credit for motives of which I had no knowledge. The more she withdrew beyond my attainment, the more desirable she became to me.

My grandmother noticed my fallen countenance and concluded that Sir Charles's indifference was the cause of it. She tried to cheer me with fragments of wise sayings which had helped her to keep her courage. She told me that there were more fish in the sea than ever came out of it. She even feigned contempt for Sir Charles, saying that I should probably be just as happy without his begrudged money. She resorted to religion for comfort, saying that if God

didn't intend me to inherit Woadley, it was because it wouldn't be good for me. She painted for me the pleasures of the contented life:

"No riches I covet, no glory I want,
H'ambition is nothing to me;
The one thing I beg of kind 'eaven to grant
Is a mind independent and free."

But she couldn't stir me out of my melancholy, for she didn't know its cause. She physicked me for financial disappointments; what I wanted was a love-antidote.

As my whole energies had formerly been bent on encountering Vi, so now they were directed towards avoiding her. For hours I would lounge in the bake-house or sit in the shop while Grandmother Cardover did her knitting, served customers, or gossiped with her neighbors. Then, against my better judgment, curiosity and longing for one more glimpse of her would drag me out into the streets, Yet, once in the streets, my chief object was to flee from her.

Now when I should have refrained from pestering her, some obstinate fate was always bringing us face to face. I was sorriest for the effect that our attitude was having on Dorrie. At first she would rush forward in a gale of high spirits to greet me, until restrained by Vi. Next time, with a child's forgetfulness, she would lift to me her pansy-face smiling, and remembering would hang back. At last she grew afraid of my troubled looks, and would hide shyly behind Vi's skirts when she saw me.

For five days I had not met them. A desperate suspicion that they had left town grew upon me. I became reckless in my desire for certainty. I could not bear the suspense. I was half-minded to call at the house where she had been staying, but that did not seem fair to her. I called myself a fool for not having stopped her in the street while I had the chance, when an explanation and an apology might have set everything on a proper footing.

On the sixth morning of her absence I rose early and went out before breakfast. The skies were gray and squally. A slow drizzle had been falling all night and, though it now had ceased, the pavements were wet. The wind came in gusts, whistling round corners of streets and houses, whirling scraps of paper high in the air. When I came to the harbor, I saw that the sea was choppy and studded with white horses. Against the piles of the pier waves were dashing and shattering into spray. From up channel, all along the horizon, drove long lines of leaden clouds.

I struck out across the denes between the sea-wall and the Beach Road. No one was about. I braced myself against the wind, enjoying its stinging coldness. The tormented loneliness of the scene was in accord with my mood. The old town, hanging red along the cliff, no longer seemed to watch me; it frowned out on the desolate waste of water in impersonal defiance.

My thoughts were full of that first morning when I had met her. I gave my imagination over without restraint to reconstructing its sensuous beauty. I saw the fire of the furze again, and scented the far-blown fragrance of wall-flowers, hiding in their crannies. But I saw as the center of it all the slim white girl with the mantle of golden hair, the deep inscrutable eyes of violet, and the slow sweet smile of *La Gioconda* playing round the edges of her mouth: gold and ivory, with poppies for her lips and sunshine for a background.

The hot blood in me was up—the gipsy blood. A stream of impassioned fancies passed before me. Ah, if I were to meet her now, I would have done with fine-spun theories of what was gentlemanly. On the lonely beach I would throw my arms about her, however she struggled, and hold her fast till she lay with her dear face looking up, crushed and submissive in my breast. After that she might leave me, but she would at least have learnt that I was a man and that I loved her.

Ahead lay the sullen wreck. I had been there only once

since our first meeting. Motives of delicacy, which I now regretted, had held me back. Now I could go there. On such a morning, though she were still in Ransby, there would be no fear of surprising her.

On entering the hull through the hole in the prow, the wind ceased, though it whistled overhead. I leant against the walls of the stranded ship, recovering my breath. I drew out my pipe, intending to take a smoke while I rested. As I turned to strike a match, an open umbrella lying in a corner on the sand, caught my attention. I went over and looked behind it; there lay a pair of woman's shoes and stockings, and a jacket, with stones placed on it to keep it down. Beneath the jacket was a disordered pile of woman's clothing.

My first thought was shame of what she might think of me, were she to find me. My second was of angry fear because she had been so foolhardy as to bathe from such a shore on such a morning.

Hurrying out of the wreck, I strode across the beach to where the surf rushed boiling up the pebbles. The waves ran high, white, and foam-capped, hammering against the land. Gazing out from shore, I could see nothing but leaden water, rising and falling, rising and falling. The height of the waves might hide a swimmer from one standing at the water's level; I raced back up the beach, and climbed the wreck. I could not discover her. The horror of what this meant stunned me; I could think of nothing else. My mind was in confusion. Then I heard my voice repeating over and over that she was not dead. The sheer monotony of the reiterated assertion, produced a sudden, unnatural clearness. "If she is not drowned, she must be somewhere out there," I said.

I commenced to sweep the sea with my eyes in ever widening circles. Two hundred yards down the shore to the left and about fifty out, I sighted something. It was white and seemed only foam at first. The crest of a wave tossed it high for a second, then shut it out; when the next wave rose it was still there.

I shouted, but my voice would not carry against the wind. The next time the white thing rose on the crest I was sure that it was the face of a woman. I saw her arm thrown out above the surface; she was swimming the over-arm stroke in an effort to make headway toward the land. I knew that she could never do it, for the current along the north beach runs seawards and the tide was going out. I gazed round in panic. The shore was forlorn and deserted. Behind me to the northward stretched the gaunt, bare cliffs. To the southward, a mile distant across the denes, stood the outskirts of the sleepy town. Before ever I could bring help, she would have been carried exhausted far out to sea, or else drowned. There was no boat on the shore between myself and the harbor. There was nothing between her and death but myself. And to go to her rescue meant death.

I scarcely know what happened. I became furious with unreasonable anger. I was angry with her for her folly, and angry with the world because it took no notice and did not care. I was determined that, before it was too late, I would go to her, so that she might understand. Yet, despite my passion, I acted with calculation and cunning. All my attention was focused on that speck of white, bobbing in the waste of churned up blackness. As I ran along the beach I kept my eyes fixed on that. When I came opposite, I waved to it. It took no notice. I hurried on a hundred yards further; the current would bear her down towards me northwards. I stripped almost naked, tearing off everything that would weigh me down. I waded knee-deep into the surf, up to where the beach shelved suddenly. I waited till a roller was on the point of breaking; diving through it, I struck out.

It was difficult to see her. Only when the waves threw us high at the same moment, did I catch a glimpse of her and get my direction. The shock of the icy coldness of the water steadied my nerves and concentrated my purpose. I was governed by a single determination—to get to her. My thought went no further than that. Nothing else mattered. I had no fear of death or of what might come after

—I had no time to think about it. I wanted to get her in my arms and shake her, and tell her what a little fool she was, and kiss her on the mouth.

Lying on my right side, keeping low in the water, I dug my way forward with an over-arm left-stroke. As my first wind went from me and I waited for my second, I settled down into the long plugging stroke of a mile race. The tide was with me, but the roughness of the water prevented rapid progress. I had to get far enough out to be at the point below her in the current to which she was being swept down.

I started counting from one to ten to keep myself from slackening, just as the cox of a racing-eight does when he forces his crew to swing out. I regarded my body impersonally, without sympathy, as though we were separate. When it suffered and the muscles ached, I lashed it forward with my will, silently deriding it with brutal profanities. The wind poured over the sea; the spray dashed up and nearly choked me. It was difficult to keep her in sight. When I saw her again, I smiled grimly at her courage and hit up a quicker pace. Who would have thought that her fragile body, so flower-like and dainty, had the strength and nerve to fight like that?

I was far enough out now to catch her. I halted, treading water; but the inaction gave my imagination time to get to work, and, when that happened, I felt myself weakening. I started up against the current, going parallel with the beach, to meet her. The one obsessing thought in my mind was to get to her. It was not so much a thought as an animal instinct. I was reduced to the primitive man, brutally battling his way towards his mate at a time of danger. While I acted instinctively, the flesh responded; directly I paused to think, my body began to shirk and my strength to ebb. Somewhere in that raging waste of water I must find and touch her. I did not care to hear her voice—simply to hold her.

Thirty feet away a gray riot of stampeding water rose against the horizon; in it I saw her face. With the swift

trudging stroke of a polo-player I made towards her. In the foam and spray I saw what looked like golden seaweed. She was drifting past me; I caught her by the hair. Out of the mist of driven chaos we gazed in one another's eyes. Her lips moved. "You!" she said.

My mind was laughing in triumph. My body was no longer weary—it was forgotten and strong again. In all the world there were just she and I. She had tried to escape me, but now the waves jostled us together. She had striven not to see me, but now my face focused all her gaze. She might look away into the smoking crest of the next roller, but her eyes must always come back. Of all live things we had loved or hated, now there remained just she and I. We had been stripped of all our acquirements and thrown back to the primitive basis of existence—a man and a woman fighting for life in chaos. For us all the careful conventions, built up by centuries, were suddenly destroyed. The polite decencies and safeguards of civilization were swept aside. The shame of so many natural things, which had made up the toll of our refinement, was contemptuously blotted out—the architecture of the ages was shattered in an instant. We were thrown back to where the first man and woman started. The only virtue that remained to us was the physical strength by which death might be avoided. The sole distinguishing characteristic between us was the female's dependence on the male, and the male's native instinct to protect her, if need be savagely with his life. Over there, a mile away, stood the red comfortable town on the cliff, where all the smug decencies were respected which we had perforce abandoned. Between us and the shore stretched fifty yards of water—a gulf between the finite and the infinite. Over there lay the moment of the present; here in eternity were she and I.

I gazed on her with stern gladness; I had got to her—she was mine. The madness for possession, which had given me strength, was satisfied. Now a fresh motive, still instinctive and primal, urged me on—I must save her. I

lifted her arm and placed it across my shoulder, so that I might support her. The great thing was to keep her afloat as long as possible. There was no going back over the path that we had traversed—both tide and current were dead against us. Already the shore was stealing away—we were being carried out to sea.

I remembered, how on that first morning, when I had warned her against bathing from the north beach, she had told me she was a good swimmer. In my all-embracing ignorance of her, I had no means of estimating how much or how little that meant. For myself, barring accidents, I judged I could keep going for two hours.

Vi was weakening. With her free left hand she was still swimming pluckily, but her right hand kept slipping off my shoulder; I had to watch her sharply and lift it back. Her weight became heavier. Her lips were blue and chattering. I noticed that her fingers were spread apart; she had cramp in the palms of her hands. Her body dragged beside me; she was losing control of it. She was no longer kicking out.

To talk, save in monosyllables, was impossible, and then one had to shout. Our ears were stopped up with water; the clash of the wind against the waves was deafening. My one fear for her was that the cramp would spread. If that happened, we would go down together.

I felt her cold lips pressed against my shoulder. As I looked round, she let go of me. "I'm done," she said.

She went under. I slipped my arm about her and turned over on my back, so that my body floated under her, and she lay across my breast. "You shan't go," I panted furiously.

"Let me," she pleaded.

But I held her. "You shan't go," I said.

My anger roused her. I turned over again, swimming the breast-stroke. She placed her arm round my neck. Her long hair washed about me.

Sometimes her eyes were closed and I thought she had fainted. Her lips had ceased to chatter. Her face lay

against my shoulder, pinched and quiet as though she were dead. My own motions were becoming mechanical. It was sheer lust of life that kept me going. I had lost sensation in my feet and hands. The shore had dwindled behind us; it seemed very small and blurred, though it was probably only half-a-mile distant. The water was less turbulent now; it rose and fell, rose and fell, with a rocking restfulness. I felt that I would soon be sleeping soundly. But in the midst of drowsing, my mind would spring up alert and I would drag her arm closer about my neck.

Above the clamor of the waves I heard a shout. At first I thought that I had given it myself. I heard it again; it was unmistakable.

Looking up out of the trough of a wave, I saw a patched sail hanging over us. My sight was misty; the sail was indistinct and yet near me. As I rose on the crest, a hand grabbed me and I felt myself lifted out on to a pile of nets.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRUTH ABOUT HER

"THAR, lad, lie still. Yow'll be 'ome direc'ly."

The gray-bearded man at the tiller smiled to me in a friendly manner. He didn't seem at all excited, but took all that had happened stoically, as part of the day's work. Seeing me gaze round questioningly, he added, "The lassie's well enough, Mr. Cardover. She'll come round. A mouthful o' salt water won't 'urt 'er."

I wondered vaguely how he knew my name. Then, as my brain cleared, I remembered him as one of the fishermen who called in at my grandmother's shop for an occasional chat, seated on a barrel.

I raised myself on my elbow. We were rounding the pier-head, running into the harbor. I was in a little shrimp-boat. The nets hung out over the stern. The old man at the tiller was in oilskins and a younger man was shortening sail.

I felt sick, and giddy, and stiff. A tarpaulin was thrown over me. I tried to recollect how I came there. Then I saw Vi lying near me in the bows. A sailor's coat was wrapped about her. Her hair lay piled in a golden heap over her white throat and breast. Her eyes were closed. The blueness of the veins about her temples enhanced her pallor. I made an effort to crawl towards her; but the motion of the boat and my own weakness sent me sprawling.

People from the pier-head had seen us. As we stole up the harbor, questions were shouted to the man at the tiller and answers shouted back. When we drew in at the quayside an excited crowd had gathered. To every newcomer

the account was given of how Joe Tuttle, as 'e war a-beating up to the 'arbor, comed across them two a-driftin' off the nor' beach, 'alf a mile or so from land.

Coats were torn off and folded round us. Someone was sent ahead to warn neighbor Cardover of what she must expect. Vi was tenderly lifted out and carried down the road in the arms of Joe Tuttle. I was hoisted like a sack across the shoulders of our younger rescuer. Accompanying us was a shouting, jabbering, eager crowd, anxious to tell everyone we passed what had happened. My most distinct recollection is the shame I felt of the bareness of my dangling legs.

The tramp of heavy feet invaded the shop. I heard the capable voice of Grandmother Cardover getting rid of sightseers. "Now then, my good people, there's nothing 'ere for you. Out you go; you're not wanted in my shop. Thank goodness, we can worry along without your 'elp." Then I heard her in a lower voice giving directions for us to be carried upstairs.

Hot blankets, brought from the bake-house oven, were soon about me and I was tucked safe in bed. I have a faint recollection of the doctor coming and of hot spirits being forced down my throat. Then they left me alone and I fell into the deep sleep of utter weariness.

When I awoke, the room was in darkness and a fire was burning. I felt lazy and comfortable. I turned on my side and found that I was alone. I began to think back. The thought that filled my mind seemed a continuation of what I had been dreaming. I was in the trough of a wave, the sea was washing over me, Vi's arm was heavy about my neck, and her lips were kissing my shoulder. I looked round; her eyes shone into mine, and her hair swayed loose about her like the hair of a mermaiden. I listened. There were footsteps on the stair. The door opened and my grandmother tiptoed to the bed.

I raised myself up. The torpor cleared from my brain. Before the question could frame itself, my grandmother

had answered it. "She's all right, Dante; she's in the spare bedroom and sleeping soundly."

She seated herself beside me and slipped her wrinkled old hand into mine beneath the bed-clothes. She sat in silence for some minutes. The light from the street-lamp shining in at the window, fell upon her. I could see her gray curls wobbling, the way they always did when she was agitated. At last she spoke. "How did it 'appen, Dante?"

I told her.

"Then you knowed 'er before?"

Little by little I gave her all the story.

"A nice young rascal you are," she said; "and a pretty way you've got o' love-making. You beat your own father, that you do. And what's her name?"

"I don't know."

"He doesn't know!" She laughed till the tears ran down her face. "And I suppose you think you're goin' to marry 'er?"

"I know I am."

"Well, the sooner the better I say. Judging by her looks, you might 'ave chose worse. When it comes to wimmen, the Evrards and the Cardovers are mad."

She went downstairs to get me some supper. I had given her Vi's address, that she might send off a message to Vi's landlady. Poor little Dorrie must be beside herself by now, wondering what had happened.

While I ate my supper, my grandmother kept referring to what I had told her. She was very proud and happy. Her eyes twinkled behind her spectacles. I had added an entirely original chapter to the history of our family's romance. "I keep wishin'," she said, "that your dear ma 'ad been alive. It would just 'a' suited her."

The morning broke bright and sunny. I insisted on getting up to breakfast. I was a trifle stiff, but apart from that none the worse for my experience. It was odd to think that Vi was sleeping in the same house—Vi, who had passed me in the streets without seeing me, Vi from

whom I had hidden myself, Vi who at this time yesterday morning had seemed so utterly unattainable. The sense of her nearness filled me with wild enthusiasm. I hummed and whistled while I dressed. I wondered how long she would make me wait before we were married. She was mine already. Why should we wait? I was impatient to go to her, I could feel the close embrace of her long white arm about my neck. I was quite incurious as to who she was or where she came from. Life for me began when I met her.

As I passed her door I halted, listening. I could hear my grandmother talking inside, but in such a low voice that I could catch nothing of what was said. She was bustling about, beating up the pillows and, as I judged, making Vi tidy. Hearing her coming towards the door, I hurried down the stairs. The stairs entered into the keeping-room. When she came down, she carried an empty breakfast-tray in her hand. I noticed that she had on her Sunday best: a black satin dress, a white lace apron trimmed with black ribbon, and her finest lace cap spangled with jet.

"She's been askin' for you."

I jumped up from my chair.

"But she won't see you until you've breakfasted."

While I hastened through the meal, my grandmother chattered gaily. She quite approved my choice of a wife and had drawn from Vi one fact, of which I was unaware—that she was an American. She was burning with curiosity to learn more about her and was full of the most rosy conjectures. She was quite sure that Vi was an heir-ess—all American women who traveled alone were.

She went up to see that all was ready; then she came to the top of the stairs and beckoned.

"I'm goin' to leave you alone," she whispered, taking my face between her hands. "God bless you, my boy." Then she vanished all a-blush and a-tremble into the keeping-room.

The blood was surging in my brain. I felt weak from too much happiness. Opening the door slowly, I entered.

I scarcely dared look up at first. The room swam before me. The old-fashioned green and red flowers in the carpet ran together. I raised my eyes to the large four-poster mahogany bed—it seemed too large to hold such a little person. I could see the outline of her figure, but the heavy crimson curtains, hanging from the tester, hid her face from me.

“Vi, darling!”

She sat up, with her hands pressed against her throat. The sunlight, shining in at the window, poured down upon her, burnishing her two long plaited ropes of hair. She turned towards me; her eyes were misty, her bosom swelling. She seemed to be calling me to her, and yet pushing me back. I felt my knees breaking under me, and the sob beginning in my throat. I ran towards her and knelt down at the bedside, placing my arms about her and drawing her to me. For an instant she resisted, then her body relaxed. I looked up at her, pouring out broken sentences. I felt that the tears were coming through excess of gladness and bowed my head.

She was bending over me, so near she stooped that her breath was in my hair. The sweet warmth of her was all about me. Her lips touched my forehead. I held her more closely, but I would not meet her eyes. I dared not till my question was answered. The silence between us stretched into an eternity. Her hands wandered over me caressingly; it seemed a child comforting a man. “Poor boy,” she whispered over and over, “God knows, neither of us meant it.”

When I lifted my face to hers, the tenderness in her expression was wiped out by a look of wild despair. She tore my hands from about her body and tumbled her head back into the pillows with her face turned from me, shaken by a storm of sobbing. Muttered exclamations rose to her lips—things and names were mentioned which I only half heard, the purport of which I could not understand. I tried to gather her to me, but she broke away from me. “Oh, you mustn’t,” she sobbed, “you mustn’t touch me.”

With her loss of self-control my strength returned. I sat beside her on the bed, stroking her hand and trying to console her—trying to tell myself that this was quite natural and that everything was well.

Gradually she exhausted herself and lay still. "You ought to go," she whispered; but when I rose to steal away, her hand clutched mine and drew me back. In a slow, weary voice she began to speak to me. "I can't do what you ask me; I'm already married. I thought you would have guessed from Dorrie."

She paused to see what I would say or do. When I said nothing, but clasped her hand more firmly, she turned her face towards me, gazing up at me from the pillow. "I thought you would have left me after that," she said. "It's all my fault; I saw how things were going."

"Dearest, you did your best."

"Yes, I did my best and hurt you. When I told you that I was done yesterday, why didn't you let me go? It would all have been so much easier."

"Because I wanted you," I said, "and still want you."

The silence was so deep that I could hear the rustle of the sheets at each intake of her breath.

"You can't have me."

Her voice was so small that it only just came to me. "I belong to Dorrie's father. He's a good man and he trusts me, though he knows I don't love him."

She sat up, letting go my hand. I propped the pillows under her. She signed to me to seat myself further away from her.

"She is mine. She is mine," I kept thinking to myself. "We belong to one another whatever she says."

"I shall be better soon," she said; "then I can go away. You must try to forget that you ever knew me."

"I can never forget. I shall wait for you." Then the old treacherous argument came to me, though it was sincerely spoken. "Why need we go out of one another's lives? Vi dearest, can't we be friends?"

She hesitated. "I was thinking of *you* when I said it.

For me it would be easier; I have Dorrie to live for. It would be more difficult for you—you are a man."

"Can't you trust me, Vi? You told me that he trusted you just now."

Her voice was thin and tired. "Could we ever be only friends?"

"We must try—we can pretend."

"But such trials all have one ending."

"Ours won't."

Her will was broken and her desire urged it. She held out her hand. "Then let's be friends."

I took it in mine and kissed it. Even then, I believe, we doubted our strength.

CHAPTER V

LUCK TURNS IN MY FAVOR

THE *Ransby Chronicle* had a full account of the averted bathing fatality. In a small world of town gossip it was a sensation almost as important as a local murder. Columns were filled up with what Vi's landlady said, and Joe Tuttle, and Mrs. Cardover, and even Dorrie. They tried to interview me without success; they couldn't interview Vi, for she was in bed. From the landlady they gleaned some facts of which I was ignorant. Vi was Mrs. Violet Carpenter, of Sheba, Massachusetts. Her husband was the owner of large New England cotton factories. She had been away from America upwards of a year, traveling in Europe. She expected to return home in a month. The history of my parentage was duly recorded, including an account of my father's elopement. All the old scandal concerning my mother was raked up and re-garnished.

Knowing what my intentions had been toward Vi, my grandmother was terribly flustered at the discovery that Vi was a married woman. She was hurt in her pride; she wanted to blame somebody. Her sense of the proprieties was offended, and she felt that her reputation was secretly tarnished. An immoral situation was existing under her roof—at least, that was what she felt. She wanted to get rid of Vi directly, but the doctor forbade her to be moved.

"And to think I should 'ave come to this!" she kept exclaiming, "after livin' all these years honored and respected in my little town! Mind, I don't blame you, and I don't blame 'er. Poor things! You couldn't 'elp it. But I can't get over it—there was you a-proposin' in my spare bedroom to a married woman, and she a-lyin' in bed! What

would folks say if they was to 'ear about it? And in my 'ouse! And me so honored and respected!"

Her horror seemed to center in the fact that it should have happened in the spare bedroom of all places, where all her dead had been laid out.

She took it for granted that Vi and I would part forever, as soon as she was well enough to travel. "By all showings, it's 'igh time she went back to 'er 'usband," she said.

She suffered another shock when I undeceived her. "You're playin' with fire, Dante; that's what you're doin'. Take the word of an old woman who knows the world—friendship will drift into familiarity and, more'n likely, familiarity'll drift into something else. A Cardover's bad enough where wimmen is concerned, but an Evrard's the devil. It's the gipsy blood that makes 'em mad."

I turned a deaf ear to all her protests. Vi and I had done nothing wicked, and we weren't going to run away from one another as though we had. A mistake had occurred which concerned only ourselves; we had nothing to be ashamed of. Then my grandmother threatened to send for Ruthita so that, at least, we might not be alone together. I was quick to see that Ruthita's presence would be a protection, so agreed that she should be invited down to Ransby provided she was told nothing. Meanwhile no meetings between Vi and myself were allowed. My grandmother guarded the spare bedroom like a dragon.

But in a timid way, in her heart of hearts, she was proud of the complication. It intrigued her. It made us all interesting persons. She wore the indignant face of a Mother Grundy because she knew that society would expect it of her; in many little sympathetic ways she revealed her truer self. She would take her knitting up to Vi's bedside—Mrs. Carpenter as she insisted on calling her—and would spend long hours there. When conversing with me in the keeping-room late at night, she would grow reminiscent and tell brave stories of the rewards which came at length to thwarted lovers. I learnt from

her that Mr. Randall Carpenter was much older than either Vi or myself. If he were to die——!

On the second morning that Vi had been in the house I returned from a desultory walk to find my grandmother in close conference with a stranger. He was a dapper, perky little man, white-haired, bald-headed, whiskered, with darting birdlike manners and a dignified air of precision about him. He had the well-dressed appearance of a city gentleman rather than of a Ransbyite. He wore a frock-coat, top-hat, gray trousers, shiny boots, and white spats. I judged that he belonged to a profession.

Apologizing for my intrusion, I crossed the keeping-room, and was on the point of mounting the stairs when the little man rose, all smiles.

"Your grandson, Mrs. Cardover, I presume? He's more of an Evrard than a Cardover—all except his mouth."

He was introduced to me as Mr. Seagirt, the lawyer.

"Happy to know you, Mr. Cardover. Happy to know you, sir." He pulled off his gloves and shook hands in a gravely formal manner. "We shall see more of one another as time goes on. I hope it most sincerely. In fact, I may say, from the way things are going, there is little doubt of it."

We all sat down. There was a strange constrained atmosphere of excitement and embarrassment about both Mr. Seagirt and my grandmother. They balanced on the edge of their chairs, flickering their eyelids and twiddling their thumbs. Lawyer Seagirt kept up a hurried flow of procrastinating conversation, continually limiting or over-emphasizing his statements.

"I have heard of what you did a day or two ago, Mr. Cardover—we have all heard of it. You have created an excellent impression—most excellent. The papers have been very flattering, but not more so than you deserve. Ransby feels quite proud of you. Though you are a Londoner, you belong to Ransby—no getting away from that. I suppose you'd tell us that you belong to Oxford. Ah, well, it's natural—but we claim you first."

All the time he had been talking he and my grandmother had been signaling to one another with their eyes, as though one were saying, "You tell him," and the other, "No, you tell him."

When they did make up their minds to take me into their secret, they did it both together.

"Your grandfather—Sir Charles Evrard," they began, and there they stuck.

At last it came out that my grandfather had expressed a wish to see me, and had sent Lawyer Seagirt to make the necessary inquiries about me. This action on his part could have but one meaning.

Two days later I was invited over to Woadley Hall to spend a week there. Before I went, I had an interview with Vi, in my grandmother's presence. She promised me that she would not leave Ransby until after I returned. My fear had been that some spasm of caution might make her seize this opportunity to return to America.

I drove out to Woadley Hall late in the afternoon, planning to get there in time for dinner. I felt considerably nervous. I had been brought up in dread of Sir Charles since childhood. I did not know what kind of conduct was expected from me or what kind of reception I might expect.

As we swung in through the iron gates and passed up the long avenue of chestnuts and elms which led through the parkland to the house, my nervousness increased into childish consternation. The pride of ancestry and the comfortable signs of wealth filled me with distress. I belonged to this, and was on my way to be examined to see whether I could prove worthy. I was not ashamed of my father's family, but I was prepared to be angry if anyone else should show shame of them.

Far away, on the edge of the green grassland, just where the woods began to cast their shadow, I could see dappled fallow-deer grazing. Colts, hearing us approaching, lifted up their heads and stared, then whisking their tails galloped off to watch us from behind their dams. Turrets.

and broken gables of the old Jacobean Hall rose out of the trees before us. Rooks were coming home to their nests in the tall elms, cawing. The home-farm lay over to our left; the herd was coming out from the milking, jingling their bells. A streak of orange lay across the blue of the west—the beginning of the sunset.

Immediately on my arrival, I was shown to my bedroom to dress. I began to have the sense of "belonging." The windows looked out on a sunken garden, all ablaze with stocks, snap-dragon, sweet-william, and all manner of old-world flowers. In the scented stillness I could hear the splash of a fountain playing in the center. Beyond that were other gardens, Dutch and Italian, divided by red walls and terraces. Beyond them all, through the shadow of trees one caught glimpses of a lake, with swans and gaily-painted water-fowl sailing like toy-yachts upon its surface.

When the servant had left me, I commenced to dress leisurely. After that I sat down, waiting for the gong to sound. I wondered if this was the room where my mother had slept. How much my father's love must have meant to her that she should have sacrificed so much prosperous certainty to share his insecure fortunes. Yet, as I looked back, it was a smiling face that I remembered, with no marks of misgiving or regret upon it.

I did not meet my grandfather until the meal was about to be served. I think he had planned our first encounter carefully, so that our conduct might be restrained by the presence of servants. His greeting was that of any host to any guest. Our conversation at dinner was on impersonal, intellectual topics—the kind that is carried on between well-bred persons who are thrown together for the moment and are compelled to be polite to one another. The only way in which he betrayed nervousness was by crumbling his bread with his left hand while he was conversing.

Finding that I was not anxious to force matters, he became more at his ease. He addressed me as Mr. Cardover,

with stiff and kindly courtesy. We took our cigars out on to the terrace to watch the last of the sunset. He was talking of Oxford, and the changes which had taken place in the University since he was an undergraduate.

"I believe you are a Fellow of Lazarus, Mr. Cardover?"

"Yes."

"I had a nephew there a few years ago, Lord Halloway, the son of my poor brother-in-law, the Earl of Lovegrove. You may know him."

"Only by hearsay. He was before my time."

My grandfather knocked the ash from his cigar. Then, speaking in a low voice, very deliberately, "I'm afraid you have heard nothing good about him. He has not turned out well."

He paused: I felt that I was being tested. When I kept silent, he continued, "I have no son. He was to have followed me."

Shortly afterwards he excused himself, saying that he was an old man and retired early to bed.

For six days we maintained our polite and measured interchange of courtesies. I was left free most of the time to entertain myself. He was a perfect host, and knew exactly how far to share my company without appearing niggardly of his companionship or, on the other hand, intruding it on me to such an extent that we wore out our common fund of interests. For myself, I wished that I might see more of him. Never by any direct statement did he own that there was any relationship between us. Yet gradually he began to imply his intention in having me to visit him.

I would have been completely happy, had it not been that Vi was absent. I reckoned up the hours until I should return. All day my imagination was following her movements. I refused to look ahead to the certainty of approaching separation—it was enough for me that I could be near her in the present.

It was strange how poignant the world had become, how subtly, swiftly suggestive, since I had discovered her pres-

ence in it. All my sensations, even those outwardly unrelated to her, grouped themselves into a memory of her sweetness. It was a blind and pagan love she had aroused—one which recognized no standards, but craved only fulfilment.

There were times when I stood back appalled, as a man who comes suddenly to the edge of a precipice, when I realized where this love was leading. Then my awakened conscience would remind me of my promise—that we would be only friends.

These were the thoughts which now made me glad, now sorrowful, as I rode through the leafy lanes round Woadley at the side of my proud old grandfather. I would steal guilty glances at him, marveling that no rumor of what I was thinking had come to him by some secret process of telepathy. He looked so cold and unimpassioned, I wondered if he had ever loved a woman.

I began to love the Woadley country with the love which only comes from ownership. The white Jacobean Hall, with the chestnuts and elm-trees grouped about it and the doves fluttering above its gables, became the starting point for all the future chapters of my romance. I began to see life in its prosperous, substantial aspect. The stately dignity of my environment had its subconscious effect upon my lawless turbulence. In the morning I would wake with the rooks cawing and, going to the window, would look out on the sunken garden, the peaches ripening against the walls, the dew sparkling on the trim box-hedges, and the leaves beating the air like wings of anchored butterflies as the wind from the sea stirred them. Everywhere the discipline of history was apparent—the accumulated, ordered effort of generations of men and women dead and gone. I had been accustomed to regard myself as an isolated unit, responsible to myself alone for my actions.

The last evening on entering my bedroom, I noticed that there had been a change in the ornaments on my dressing-table. A gold-framed miniature had been placed in the middle of the table, face up, before the mirror. It was

a delicate, costly piece of work done on ivory. I held it to the light to examine it, wondering how it had come there.

It must have been taken in the heyday of my mother's girlhood, when all the county bachelors were courting her. The gray eyes looked out on me with bewitching frankness. The red lips were parted as if on the point of widening into laughter. The long white neck held the head poised at an angle half-arch, half-haughty. As I gazed on it, I saw that the similarity between our features was extraordinary. It was my grandfather's way of expressing to me the tenderness that he could not bring himself to utter.

After breakfast next morning, he led the way into the library. He looked graver and more unapproachable than ever. "Mr. Cardover, your visit has been a great pleasure to me. Mr. Seagirt will be here before you leave. Before he comes I wish to say that I want no thanks for what I am doing. It is more or less a business matter. All your life there have been strained relations between myself and your father, which it is impossible for any of us to overlook or forget. So far as you are concerned, you owe him your loyalty. I do not propose to bring about unhappiness between a father and a son by encouraging your friendship further. This week was a necessary exception; I could not take the step I have now decided on without knowing something about you."

He cleared his throat and rose from his chair, as if afraid that I might lay hold of him. He walked up and down the library, with his head bowed and his right hand held palm out towards me in a gesture that asked for silence. He halted by the big French window, on the blind before which years ago I had watched his shadow fall. He stood with his back towards me, looking down the avenue. Then he turned again to me. The momentary emotion which had interrupted him had vanished. His voice was more cold and polite than ever. Only the twitching of the muscles about his eyes betrayed the storm of feeling that stirred him.

"In any case," he said, "you would have inherited my baronetcy. Perhaps, you did not know that. I could not alienate that from you. The patent under which it is held allows it to pass, for one generation, through the female line to the next male holder. Until recently my will was made in the favor of my nephew, Lord Halloway. Circumstances have arisen which lead me to believe that such a disposal of my estate would be unwise. We Evrards have had our share of frailties, but we have always been noted as clean men. Something that I saw about you in the papers brought your name before my notice. I made up my mind then and there that, if you proved all that I hoped for, I would make you my successor. As I have said, this is a business transaction, in return for which I neither expect nor wish any display of gratitude."

While we had been speaking I had heard the trot of a horse approaching. Just as he finished Mr. Seagirt entered.

"Mr. Seagirt," said Sir Charles, "I have explained the situation to Mr. Cardover. Any communications he or I have to make to one another relative to the estate, we will make through you. If you have brought the will, I will sign it."

He was fingering his pen, when I startled him by speaking. "Sir Charles, you have spoken of not encouraging my friendship. I am a grown man and of an age to choose my own friendships where I like, and this without offense to my father. I have another loyalty, to my dead mother—a loyalty which you share. If you care to trust me, I should like to be your friend."

He took my hand in his and for one small moment let his left hand rest lightly on my shoulder. We gazed frankly into one another's eyes without pretense or disguise. Then the shame of revealing his true feelings returned.

"We shall see. We shall see," he muttered hastily; "I am an old man."

CHAPTER VI

MOTHS

A WEEK had worked wonders with Grandmother Card-over. She had fallen a victim to Vi's charm and, in that strange way that old folks have, had warmed her age at the fire of Vi's youth. There was an unmistakable change in her; the somberness of her dress was lightened here and there with a dash of colored ribbons. As long as I could remember, the only ornaments she had permitted herself were of black jet, as befitted her widowed state. But now the woman's instinct for self-decoration had come to life. Vi's exquisite femininity had made her remember that she herself was a woman. She had rummaged through her jewelry and found a large gold-set cameo brooch, which she wore at her throat, and some rings, and a long gold chain, which she now wore about her neck, from which her watch was suspended.

Vi's vivid physical beauty and intense joy in life had broadened the horizons of everyone in the house, and set them dreaming. Ruthita, coming down from London, had at once become infatuated. From day to day she had prolonged Vi's visit, now with one excuse, now another. They had brought Dorrie down to stay with Vi at the shop—little Bee's Knee as my Grannie called her, because she was so tiny and a bee's knee was the smallest thing she could think of with which to compare her. It was many years since a child's prattle had been heard about that quiet house. Vi's comradeship with her little daughter finished the persuading of my grandmother that she was safe and good. All virtuous women believe in the virtue of a woman who is fond of children.

They were sitting down to lunch in the keeping-room when I entered.

"Why, if it isn't Dante!"

The greeting I received was in welcome contrast to the cold, guarded reserve of the past seven days. A place was made for me at table between my grandmother and Ruthita. It was a gay little party that waited, watching me curiously across the dishes and plates, to hear my news. Just then I preferred the cosiness of my grandmother's shop to the chilly dignity of Woadley Hall. Outside the sunshine slanted across the courtyard, leaving one half in shadow, the other golden white. The maid, coming in and out from the kitchen in her rustling print-dress, with her smiling country face, was a pleasanter sight than the butler at Woadley. From the shop came the smell of tar and rope and new-made bread. Everything was so frank and kindly, and unashamed of itself. Here in the keeping-room of the ship-chandler's shop we were humanly intimate—"coxy-loxy" as my grandmother would have expressed it.

I told a sorrowful tale at first, which seemed to foreshadow a sorrowful ending. I spoke of the stiff formality of my reception, the garnished gentility which had marked my intercourse with Sir Charles, the withheld confidence—the fact that my mother's name was scarcely mentioned. Ruthita's hand sought mine beneath the table; I could feel the fingers tremble.

"This morning," I said, "he called me into his study. He told me that I must leave within the hour and that our friendship could go no further."

"The old rascal!" exclaimed Grandmother Cardover, bringing down her knife and fork on her plate with a clatter. "What was he a-doin', gettin' you there to Woadley? He must 'a' known what we all expected."

I tilted back my chair, putting on an expression of long-suffering melancholy. "He wanted to see what I was like, I suppose. His chief reason was that he wanted to make a new will."

Babel broke loose. Why hadn't I told them earlier? Why had I harrowed up their feelings for nothing? What were the particulars? I was cruel to have kept them in suspense.

Grandmother Cardover was hysterical with joy. She wanted to run out into the streets and tell everybody. She began with the maid in the kitchen, and would have gone on to the men in the bake-house if I hadn't stopped her by appealing to her curiosity, saying there was more to tell. As for Ruthita, she just put her arms about me and laid her head on my shoulder, crying for sheer gladness. Little Bee's Knee looked on open-mouthed, shocked that grown-ups should behave so foolishly. Vi gazed at me with a far-away stare in her eyes, picturing the might-have-beens, and I gazed back at her across the gulf that widened between us.

Discretion was thrown to the wind. When Vi gathered Dorrie to her and began to excuse herself, she was told that she must stay and make one of the family. Then the story was told again with the new perspective.

With shame and self-reproach I look back and perceive how carelessly I accepted all Ruthita's admiration. My new good fortune promised nothing for her; yet she could rejoice in it. In her shy girl's world, had I known it, I figured as something between a faery-prince and a hero. Through me she looked out into a more generous world of glamour than any she had personally experienced. Poor little Ruthita, with her mouse-like timidity! She had lived all her days in a walled-in garden, treading the dull monotonous round of self-sacrificing duties. No one ever credited her with a career of her own. No one stopped to think that she might have dreams and a will of her own. They told her what to do and let their gratitude be taken for granted. She humored my father when he was discouraged, did the housekeeping, and took shelter behind the superior social grace of the Snow Lady. We all loved her, but we made the mistake of not telling her—we supposed she knew. All the strong things that men and women do

together, all love's comedy and tragedy, were so much hearsay to her.

That afternoon and evening she sat beside me holding my hand with frank affection, making me feel that in loving Vi I was stealing something that belonged to her. More than that, I was feeling for this woman, who had been nothing to me a few weeks ago, a quality of kindness and consideration that I had always withheld from the child-friend who had tiptoed her way up to womanhood beside me.

After tea we mounted to the drawing-room, which was over the shop and faced the street. It was usually occupied only on Sundays and feast-days, or when a visiting Methodist minister had been apportioned to my grandmother for entertainment. Faded engravings of sacred subjects and simpering females elaborately framed, hung upon the walls. On the mantelshelf stood some quaint specimens of Ransby china—red-roofed cottages with grapes ripening above the porch, and a lover coming up the path while his lady watched him from the window. The chairs were upholstered in woolwork on canvas, which my grandmother had done in her youth. In one corner stood a heavy rosewood piano on which all the family portraits were arranged. In this room comfort was sacrificed to appearance—the furniture was sedate rather than genial. Nothing was haphazard or awry. The mats and antimacassars never budged an inch from their places. No smell of beer, or cheese, or baking bread vulgarized the sacred respectability of its atmosphere.

Here, as we sat together talking, the light began to fade. Heavy footsteps of sailors in their sea-boots, passing down the street from the harbor to the cottages, only emphasized the quiet. We watched the sky grow pink behind the masts of shipping, then green, then gray. Cordage and rigging were etched distinctly against the gloom of the oncoming night. At the top of the street a light sprang up, then another, then another. The lamp-lighter with his long pole and ladder passed by. Now with the heavy tread

of men's feet the tip-a-tap of girls' footsteps began to mingle. Sometimes a snatch of laughter would reach us; then, as if afraid of the sound it made, it died abruptly away. While we talked in subdued voices, it seemed to me that all the sailor-lovers with their lassies had conspired to steal by the house that night. I fell to wondering what it felt like to slip your arm about the waist of a woman you loved, feel her warmth and trust and nearness, feel her head droop back against your shoulder, see her face flash up in the starlight and know that, while your lips were trembling against hers, she was abandoning herself soul and body to you in the summer dusk.

Dorrie had crept into her mother's lap. Her soft breathing told that she was sleeping. One small hand, with fingers crumpled, rested against her mother's throat. Someone had called to see Grandmother Cardover, so Vi, Ruthita, and I were left alone together. Sitting back in our chairs out of reach of the street-lamp, we could not see the expression on one another's faces.

"I would give all the world to be you, Mrs. Carpenter," Ruthita whispered.

"To be me! Why? I sometimes get very tired of it."

"If I were you I should have Dorrie. It must be very sweet to be a mother. Why is it that she always calls you Vi and never mother?"

"She picked that up from her father. I never corrected her because—well, because somehow I like it. It makes me seem younger."

"You don't need to *seem* young," I interrupted.

"How old do you think I am?"

"About the same age as myself and Ruthita."

She laughed. "That couldn't be; Dorrie is eight."

"Then I give up guessing."

"I'm twenty-seven. I was little more than a child, you see, when I married."

"Mother married early," said Ruthita, "and my papa was only twenty at the time. She says that early marriages turn out happiest."

Vi made no answer. The silence grew awkward. We could almost hear one another's thoughts trying to hide. Why had she explained in that tone of half-apology, "I was little more than a child, you see, when I married"? Why didn't she say something now? Was it because an early marriage had proved for her disastrous? Then, if it had, what moral obligation separated us? Who was this husband who could dispense with her for a year, and yet had the power to stretch out his arm across the Atlantic and thrust me aside?

She leant forward. The light from the street-lamp kindled her face and smoldered in her hair. She had the wistful, rapt expression of a young girl, ignorant as yet of the bitter-sweet of love, who dreams of an ideal lover. I felt then that her soul was virgin; it had never been a man's possession. It was almost mine.

Ruthita's remark about the happiness of early marriages was forgotten, when Vi returned to the subject. "They may be sometimes," she said, speaking doubtfully.

She caught my eye resting on her. Conscious that her qualification had divulged a secret, she hurried into an implied defense of her husband.

"I had a letter from Mr. Carpenter this morning. He's lonely. He says he can't bear to be without me any longer. He wants me to return home at once. He's not seen Dorrie for nearly a year. He's afraid she'll forget him entirely. If I don't go to him, he says he'll come and fetch me. It's been horrid of me to stay away so long. When we left, we only intended to be gone for three months. Somehow the time lengthened. I wanted to see so much. He's been too easy with me. He's been awfully kind. He always has been kind. He treats me like a spoilt child."

She had been speaking so eagerly and hurriedly that she had not heard the creaking of the stairs. Through the darkness I could see my grandmother standing in the doorway. Vi turned to Ruthita with a pretense of gaiety, "No wonder you English don't understand us. Don't you think that American husbands are very patient?"

"I'm sure I do," said Ruthita. "What makes them so different from English husbands?"

"They love their wives."

It was impossible to tell from the bantering tone in Vi's voice, whether she spoke the last words in cynicism or sincerity.

Grandmother Cardover took her literally. Her national pride was touched. She believed that an aspersion had been cast on the affection of all married Englishmen. She advanced into the room with suspicions aroused, bristling with morality. "If that's what they call love in America," she snorted, "then it's glad I am that I was born in Ransby. 'They shall be one flesh'—that's what the Holy Book says about marriage. And 'ow can you be one flesh if you stay away from one another a twelvemonth at a time? Why, when my Will'am was alive, I never slept a night away from 'im, from the day we was married to the day he died."

The darkness about her seemed to quiver with indignation. I could see her gray curls bobbing, and hear the keys hanging from her waist jangle, as she trembled. Ruthita cowered close to me, shocked and frightened. Dorrie woke and began to whimper to be taken to bed. We all waited for a natural expression of anger from Vi.

She set Dorrie on to her feet very gently, whispering to her mothering words, telling her not to cry. Drawing herself up, she faced into the darkness. When she spoke there was a sweet, low pleading in her voice.

"Mrs. Cardover, you took me too seriously. I'm sorry. You misunderstood me. I believe all that you have said—a wife ought to be her husband's companion. There have been reasons for my long absence, which I cannot explain; if I did, you might not understand them. But I want *you* always to believe well of me. I have never had such kindness from any woman as you have given me."

I heard my Grannie snifle. Vi must have heard her. She left Dorrie and, running across the room, put her arms about her. I heard them blaming themselves, and taking

everything back, the way women do when they ask forgiveness. I lifted Dorrie into my arms, and Ruthita and I tiptoed from the room.

Presently they came down to us. Grandmother Cardover was smiling comically, as though she was rather pleased at what had happened. Vi said that she must be going. Ruthita and I volunteered to accompany her back to her lodgings. So the storm in the tea-cup ended, leaving me with new materials for conjecture and reflection.

On the way up the High Street we chatted volubly, trying to overlay what had occurred with a new impression. We talked against time and without sincerity. When we had reached the black flint house and the door had shut, Ruthita snuggled close to me with a relieved little sigh. Ever since my return from Woadley she had been waiting for this moment of privacy. With a sweet sisterly air of proprietorship she slipped her arm through mine. We turned down a score and struck out across the denes to the north beach, where we could be quiet. A wet wind from the sea pattered about our faces, giving Ruthita an excuse to cling yet more closely.

You would not have called Ruthita beautiful in those days. She lacked the fire that goes with beauty. She was too humble in her self-esteem, too self-effacing. But one who had looked closely would have discerned something more lasting than mere physical beauty—the loveliness of a pure spirit looking out from her quiet eyes. She was one of those domestic saints, unaware of their own goodness, that one sometimes finds in middle-class families; women who are never heard of, who live only through their influence on their menfolk's lives.

Her features were small, but perfect. Her figure slight, and buoyant in its carriage. Her complexion white, but ready to suffuse with color at the least sign of appreciation. Her glory was in her hair, which was black and abundant as night. From a child I had always thought that her feet and hands were most beautiful in their fragile tininess. I never told her any of these flattering observations, which

would have meant so much if put into words. Brothers don't—and I was as good as her brother.

"Don't you think," said Ruthita, "that there's something awfully queer about Mrs. Carpenter's marriage? I've been with her nearly a week now, and I've never heard her mention her husband until to-night."

"And Dorrie doesn't speak of him either."

"No, I've noticed that."

Then Ruthita surprised me. "Do you know, Dante, I think to marry the wrong man must be purgatory."

I was amused at the note of seriousness in her voice.

"Ruthie, to hear you speak one'd suppose you'd been in love. Have you ever thought that you'll have to marry some day?"

"Of course I have."

"What'll he have to be like?"

She held her tongue. My jauntiness had made her shy. "Come, Ruthie," I said, "I didn't mean to hurt you. I hate to own that you're grown up. I didn't think you'd given a thought to marriage. Tell me, what'll he have to be like?"

I halted, swinging her round so she had to look up in my face. She wore a hunted look of cornered perplexity.

"I've never spoken of these things even to mother," she said. "They all treat me as though I were still a child."

I wondered what was her trouble. The search-light swept her. I saw the eagerness for confession on her trembling mouth.

The fire which her beauty had always lacked leapt up. I was amazed at the transformation. She looked reckless. The mask of maidenly tranquillity had slipped aside; I saw all the longing of her unnoticed womanhood focused for an instant in her eyes. The search-light traveled out to sea again. I repeated, "What must he be like?"

She reached up to me, so that her lips almost touched mine. "I think he must be like you," she whispered.

Of all answers that was the last I had expected. I had thought myself on the brink of some great discovery—

that she, too, had some secret lover. I slipped my arm about her and we strolled on through the darkness in silence. Ahead the harbor-lights, reflected across the water, drew nearer. We climbed the beach and the sea-wall, and made our way across the denes to the town.

"You're all wrong," I said. "Some day, when you do fall in love, you'll get a better standard."

We entered the lamp-lit town. For the rest of the evening we did not say much. I was thinking how easy it is for two people to live always together and yet never to understand each other. Who would have guessed that little Ruthita had this hunger to be loved?

While we were seated at breakfast next morning, someone walked across the shop and tapped on the door of the keeping-room. Before any of us could spring up, Lawyer Seagirt entered.

"Keep your seats. Keep your seats," he said cheerily. "I'm sure you'll excuse this early call when you hear what I've come about."

With his back to the empty fireplace, he straddled the hearthrug, bowing first to my grandmother, then to Ruthita. Then he settled his gaze on me, with the beaming benevolence of a bachelor uncle. He cleared his throat.

"Ahem! Ahem! Mr. Cardover, I congratulate you. After you left yesterday, Sir Charles spoke of you with considerable feeling. He expressed sentiments concerning you which from him meant much—much more than if uttered by any other man. For many years he has honored me with his confidence, yet on no occasion do I remember him to have displayed so much emotion. Of course all this is strictly between ourselves and must go no further."

Like three mandarins we nodded.

"It is my pleasant duty to have to inform you, Mr. Cardover, that Sir Charles has been pleased to make you an allowance. It will be paid quarterly on the first day of January, April, July, and October, and will be delivered to you through my hands."

Again he halted. Grandmother Cardover, losing pa-

tience, forgot her manners. "God bless my soul," she exclaimed, "how the man maunders! How much?"

"Madam," said Lawyer Seagirt, "the amount is four hundred pounds per annum."

The good man had never found himself so popular. He was made to sit down to table with us, despite his protests that he had breakfasted already. The money might have been coming out of his own pocket for all the fuss we made of him. Every now and then the fact of my prosperity would strike Grandmother Cardover afresh. Throwing up her hands she would exclaim, "Four 'undred pounds, and he's got two 'undred already from his fellowship! It's more than I've ever earned in any year with all my wear and tear. Just you wait till his pa 'ears about it!"

That morning I took Ruthita to Norwich. She was puzzled when I told her to get ready to come. All the way over in the train she kept trying to guess my purpose. The truth was I had contrasted her with Vi. Vi was not only exquisite in herself, but as expensively exquisite as fine clothes could make her. Ruthita, on the other hand, had the appearance of making the most genteel impression at the minimum expenditure of money. My father's means were narrow, and she was not his daughter; therefore the Snow Lady insisted on making most of her own and Ruthita's dresses. Rigid economies had been exercised; stuffs had been turned, and dyed, and made over again. Now that I could afford it, I was determined to see what fine feathers could do for this shy little sister.

When the gowns came home, even Ruthita was surprised at the prettiness that filmy muslins and French laces accentuated in her.

"My word, Ruthie, you're a dainty little armful. You won't have to wait long for that lover now," I told her, when she came down into the keeping-room to show herself to me.

She pouted and made a face at me like a child. "I don't want lovers," she laughed. "I only want my big brother."

When she had gone upstairs my grandmother turned to me. "You can go too far with her, Dannie." She only called me Dannie when she was saying something serious or a little wounding. "You can go too far with her, Dannie. I should advise you to be careful."

"What are you driving at?" I asked bluntly.

"Just this, that however you may pretend to one another, she isn't your sister and you aren't her brother. Any day you may wake something up in her that you didn't mean to."

"Stuff and nonsense," I replied. "At heart she's only a child."

"All I can say is you're going the right way to work to make her a woman," my grandmother said shortly.

That afternoon I persuaded Ruthita to put on all her finery and come for a walk on the esplanade. I wanted her to lose her timidity and to discover for herself that she was as good as anybody. I felt a boyish pride in walking beside her; she was my creation—I had dressed her.

We had passed the pier and entered the long trim walk, lined with sculptured Neptunes, which runs along the sea-front from Ransby to Pakewold, when a figure which had a morbid interest for me came in sight. It was that of a buxom broad-hipped woman, handsome in her own bold fashion, leading by the hand an over-dressed, half-witted child. As she drew nearer, the rouge on her face became discernible. She strolled with a swagger through the fashionable crowd, eyeing the men with sly effrontery. She was known in Ransby by the nickname of "Lady Halloway." She was the bathing-machine man's daughter, and had been the victim of one of my cousin's earliest amorous adventures. It was commonly believed that he was the father of her child.

Since the news had got abroad that I had supplanted Halloway in my grandfather's favor, she had glowered at me, with undisguised hostility, whenever we met.

As we passed, Ruthita's parasol just touched her. It was the woman's fault, for she had crowded us pur-

posely. I raised my hat, muttering an apology, and was on the point of moving forward, when she wrenched the parasol from Ruthita's hand and flung it to the ground. Ruthita stared at her too surprised to say a word. The woman herself, for the moment, was too infuriated to express herself. All the bitterness of a deserted mistress, the pent-up resentment against years of contempt and the false pride with which she had brazened out her shame among her fellow-townsmen, came to the surface and found an excuse for utterance. People nearest to us halted in their promenade and, gathering round, began to form the nucleus of an audience. An audience for her oratory was what "Lady Holloway" most desired. Her lips were drawn back from her teeth and her hands were clenched; anger re-created her into something almost magnificent and wholly brutal. When she spoke, she addressed herself to Ruthita, but her eyes were fixed on mine in vixenish defiance. The over-dressed, top-heavy oddity at her side steadied himself by clinging to her skirts, gazing from one to the other of us with a vacant, wondering expression.

I picked up Ruthita's parasol and handed it back to her, whispering that she should go on. The woman heard me.

"Yes, go on, my fine lady," she sneered in savage sarcasm. "Go on. You're too good ter be zeen a-talkin' wi' the likes o' me. Yer know wot I am. I'm a woman wot's fallen. I ain't too bad, 'owsomever, for Mr. Cardover to diddle me out o' my property. He's a grand man, Mr. Cardover, wi' 'is high airs and proud ways. And where do 'e get them from, I ax. From old Cardover's bake-'ouse around the corner ter be sure, and from 'is mawther, wot ran orf wi' 'is father and 'ad the good luck ter get married."

I interrupted her. "I'm very sorry for you," I said, "but you've got to stop this at once. You don't know what you're saying, neither does anyone else. Please let us pass."

She stepped in front of us with her plump arms held up in fighting attitude, blocking our path.

"Zorry for me. Zorry for me," she laughed, still addressing Ruthita. "I doan't want 'is zorrow. Your man's a thief, my gal, and it's the likes o' him wot despises me—me as should be Lady Halloway if I 'ad me rights, me as should be livin' at Woadley 'All as zoon as Sir Charles be dead and gorn. 'E says 'e's zorry for me, wi' the lawful heir, the child 'e 'as robbed, a-standin' in 'is sight. The impudence of 'im!"

She gave the idiot's hand a vicious jerk, swinging him in front of her, so that the lawful heir began to holloa. Someone who had newly joined the crowd, inquired what was up.

"Wot's up, you axed. This gentleman, as 'e calls 'isself, told 'is gal to barge inter me. That's wot's up, and I won't stand it. 'E's robbed my kid, wot was heir, o' wot belongs ter 'im. And 'e's robbed my 'usband, for 'e's as good as my 'usband in the sight o' almighty Gawd. 'E treats me like a dorg and tells 'is gal to barge inter me, and 'e thinks I'll stand it."

While she had been exploding I had tried to back away from her, but she followed. Now a policeman's helmet showed above the heads of the spectators. Just then the bathing-machine man strolled up from the beach out of curiosity. Seeing his daughter the center of disturbance, he fought his way to the front and seized her by the wrists with a threatening gesture. "Yer fool, Lottie," he panted, "when are yer goin' ter be done a-disgracin' o' me?"

For a moment she was cowed. But as he dragged her away to the bathing-machines, she tore one hand free and shook her fist at me. "'E's comin' down to-morrer," she shouted. "I've writ and told 'im wot you've been a-doin' at Woadley."

Ruthita was trembling all over with disgust and excitement. I took her back to the shop. When I was alone with my grandmother I asked her what kind of a woman Lottie was.

"As nice and kind a little girl as there was in Ransby,"

she answered, "until that rascal, Lord Halloway, ruined her."

Next day I had a chance of judging for myself the worth of Lord Halloway. In the afternoon, just as I was going out, I was told that he was waiting to see me in the shop. I went to meet him prepared for trouble. I found a tall, aristocratic man of about thirty-five, filling up the doorway, looking out into the street with his legs wide apart. He was swinging his cane and whistling softly. The impression one got from his back-view was that he was extremely athletic. When he turned round I saw that he was magnificently proportioned, handsome, high complexioned, and graceful to the point of affectation. When he smiled and held out his hand, his manner was so winning that every prejudice was for the moment swamped. He had the instinctive art of charm.

"Awfully sorry to have to meet you like this for the first time," he said. "We're second-cousins, aren't we? Strange how we've managed to miss one another, and being members of the same college and all."

He had removed his hat, and was leaning against the door-jamb, with his legs crossed. I watched him narrowly while he was talking. I had expected to see a cultured degenerate—the worst type of bounder. Instead of being exhausted and nervous with a spurious energy, he was almost military in his upright carriage. He had a dare-devil air of careless command, which was so much a part of his breeding that it was impossible to resent it. A man would have summed up his vices and virtues leniently by saying that he was a gay dog. A good woman might well have fallen in love with him, and excused the attraction that his wickedness had for her by saying that she was trying to convert him. The only sign of weakness I could detect was a light inconsequent laugh, strangely out of keeping with the virility of his height and breadth; it was like the vain and meaningless giggle of a silly woman.

I asked him if he would not come inside. He shook his head, saying that this was not a social visit, but that he

had come to apologize. Then he faced me with an openness of countenance which impressed me as manly, but which might have been due to shamelessness.

"I want to tell you how sorry I am for the beastly row you had yesterday. Lottie's not a bad sort, but she gets fancies and they run away with her. I've talked with her, and I can promise you it won't happen again. She's been writing me angry letters for the past week, ever since you made it up with Sir Charles. I was afraid something like this would happen, so I thought I'd just run down. I wish I'd managed to get here earlier."

He stopped suddenly, gazing toward the keeping-room door. Ruthita came out and crossed the shop. She had on one of her new dresses and was on her way to tea with Vi.

He followed her with his eyes till she was gone. There was nothing insulting in the gallantry with which he admired her; he seemed rather surprised—that was all. For a minute he continued conversing with me in an absent-minded manner, then he wished me good-by, hoping that we might meet again in Oxford. I walked out on to the pavement and watched him down the street. Then I hurriedly fetched my hat and followed.

It might have been accidental and I may have been over-suspicious, but his path lay in the same direction as Ruthita's; he never walked so quickly as to overtake her or so slowly as not to keep her well in sight. When she entered the old flint house, he hesitated, as though the purpose of his errand was gone; then, seeing me out of the tail of his eye, he turned leisurely to the left down a score. Next day I heard that he had departed from Ransby.

I could not rid myself for many days of the impression this incident had created. Like a Hogarth canvas, it typified for me the ugly nemesis of illicit passion in all its grotesque nakedness. There was horror in connecting such a man as Holloway with such a woman as Lottie. The horror was emphasized by the child. Yet Lottie had once been "as nice and kind a little girl as there was in Ransby," until he destroyed her. Doubtless at the time, their sinning had

seemed sweet and excusable—much the same as the love of any lover for any lass. Only the result had proved its bitterness.

This thought made me go with a tightened rein. When impulse tempted me to give way, the memory of that woman with her half-witted child, brazening out her shame before a crowd of pleasure-seekers on the sunlit esplanade, sprang into my mind and turned me back like the flame of a sword.

CHAPTER VII

THE GARDEN OF TEMPTATION

It was the late afternoon of a September day. We had had tea early at the black flint house, Vi, Ruthita, Dorrie, and I. After tea a walk had been proposed; but Dorrie had said she was "tho tired" and Ruthita had volunteered to stay with her.

For two months Vi and I had never allowed ourselves the chance of being alone together; yet every day we had met. To her I was "Mr. Cardover"; to me she was "Mrs. Carpenter." Even my grandmother had ceased to suspect that any liking deeper than friendship existed between us. She loved to have young people about her, and therefore encouraged Vi and Dorrie. She thought that we were perfectly safe now that we had Ruthita. Through the last two months we four had been inseparable, rambling about, lazy and contented. Our conversations had all been general, Vi and I had never trusted ourselves to talk of things personal. If, when walking in the country, Ruthita and Dorrie had run on ahead to gather wild flowers, we had made haste to follow them, so betraying to each other the tantalizing fear we had one of another. We were vigilant in postponing the crisis of our danger, but neither of us had the strength to bring the danger to an end by leaving Ransby, lest our separation should be forever.

If our tongues were silent, there were other ways of communicating. Did I take her hand to help her over a stile, it trembled. Did I lift her wraps and lean over her in placing them about her shoulders, I could see the faint rise of her color. Her eyes spoke, mocked, laughed, dared, and pleaded, when no other eyes were watching.

Since the one occasion that has been related, Vi had not mentioned her husband. Whether he was still urging her to return, or had extended her respite, or was on his way to fetch her, I had no means of guessing. I lived in a secret delirium of exalted happiness and torturing foreboding. Each day as it ended was tragic with farewell. The hour was coming when I must return to Oxford and when she must return to America. Soon we should have nothing but memories. However well we might disguise our motives for dawdling in Ransby, it could not be long before their hollowness would be detected. Already Sir Charles had ceased to serve me as an excuse; I had not seen him since my departure from Woadley.

The very suavity of our interchanged courtesies and unsatisfying pretense of frank friendship gave edge to my yearning.

I had come at last to the breaking-point. I did not know it. I still told myself that we were both too honorable to step aside: that we had too much to lose by it; that I loved her too dearly to let her be anything to me unless she could be my wife. The casuistry of this attitude was patent.

As my hunger increased I grew more daring. No thoughts that were not of her could find room in my mind. I had lost my interest in books—they were mere reports on the thing I was enduring. Nature was only my experience made external on a lower physical plane. My imagination swept me on to depths and heights which once would have terrified. I grew accustomed to picturing myself as the hero of situations which I had formerly studied with puzzled amazement in other men's lives.

The face of Lottie, encountered daily in the gray streets of Ransby, which had at first restrained me by reminding me of sin's ultimate ugliness, ceased to warn me.

When Ruthita made the suggestion that we should go for our walk alone together, I had expected a prompt refusal from Vi. She rose from the disordered tea-table and walked over to the window, turning her back on us. I could see by the poise of her head that she was gazing

down the gardens, across the denes to the wreck, where everything important had taken place. I could guess the memories that were in her mind.

From where I sat I could see her head, framed in the window against the slate-colored expanse of water, the curved edge of the horizon, and the orange-tinted sky.

Creeping across the panes under full sail came a fleet of fishing smacks, losing themselves one by one as they advanced into the tangled amber of her hair. I counted them, telling myself that she would speak when the foremost had re-appeared on the other side. Then it occurred to me that she was waiting for me to urge her.

"Mrs. Carpenter," I said casually, "won't you come? It's going to be a jolly evening. We can go by way of St. Margaret's Church to the Broads and watch the sunset."

Without moving her body, she commenced to drum with her fingers on the panes.

"That would take time," she procrastinated. "We couldn't get back before eight. Who'd put Dorrie Darling to bed?"

"Don't worry," Ruthita broke in with eagerness. "I'd love to do it. Dorrie and I'll take care of one another and play on the sands till bedtime."

"Yeth, do go," lisped Dorrie. "I want Ruthita all to mythelf."

These two who had stood between us, for whose sakes we had striven to do right, were pushing wide the door that led into the freedom of temptation.

A shiver ran through her. She turned. The battle against desire in her face was ended.

"I will come," she said slowly.

Left in the room by myself while they went upstairs to dress, I did not think; I abandoned myself to sensations. I could hear their footsteps go back and forth above my head. The running ones were Dorrie's. The light, quick ones were Ruthita's. The deliberate ones, postponing and anticipating forbidden pleasures—they were Vi's. The

sound of her footsteps, so stealthy and determined, combined with the long gray sight of the German Ocean, sent my mind back to Guinevere's description of her sinning, which covered all our joint emotions:—

“ As if one should

Slip slowly down some path worn smooth and even,
Down to a cool sea on a summer day;
Yet still in slipping there was some small leaven
Of stretched hands catching small stones by the way
Until one surely reached the sea at last,
And felt strange new joy as the worn head lay
Back, with the hair like sea-weed; yea, all past
Sweat of the forehead, dryness of the lips
Washed utterly out by the dear waves o'ercast,
In a lone sea, far off from any ships! ”

She entered. She was alone. The others were not yet ready. I could not speak to her. “ Come,” she whispered hoarsely. Her voice had the distressed note of hurry.

We hastened up the High Street like fugitives. Windows of the stern red houses were eyes. They knew all about us. They had watched my mother before me; by experience they had become wise. At the top of the town we turned to the left, going inland towards the hill on which the tower of St. Margaret's rose gray against the sky, beyond which lay the open country. We did not walk near together, but with a foot between us. Now we slackened our pace and I observed her out of the corners of my eyes. She was dressed in white, all billowy and blowy, with a wrap of white lace thrown over her shoulders, and a broad white hat from which drooped a blue ostrich feather. Whatever had been her intention, she looked bridal. The slim slope of her shoulders was unmatronly. Her long neck curved forward, giving her an attitude of listening demureness. Her mass of hair and large hat scarcely permitted me to see her face.

We came to St. Margaret's and passed. Was it a sense of the religious restraints that it represented, that made us

hurry our footsteps? We turned off into a maze of shadowy lanes. We were happier now that we were safe from observation. We could no longer fancy that we saw our own embarrassment reflected as suspicion in strangers' eyes. We drew together. My hand brushed hers. She did not start away. I let my fingers close on it.

The golden glow of evening was in the tree-tops. The first breath of autumn had scorched their leaves to scarlet and russet. Behind their branches long scarves of cloud hung pink and green and blood-red. Far away, on either side, the yellow standing wheat rustled. Nearer, where it had been cut, the soil showed brown beneath the close-cropped stubble. Honeysuckle, climbing through the hedges, threw out its fragrance. Evening birds were calling. Distantly we could hear the swish of scythes and the cries of harvesters to their horses. Hidden from the field-workers, we stole between the hedges with the radiant peace of the sunset on our faces. As yet we had said nothing.

She drew her hand free from mine and halted. Scrambling up the bank, she pulled down a spray of black-berries. I held the branch while she plucked them. We dawdled up the dusty lane, eating them from her hand.

"Vi," I said softly, "we have tried to be only friends. What next?"

I was smiling. She knew that I did not hint at parting. She smiled back into my eyes; then looked away sharply. I put my arm about her and drew her to me. Without a struggle, she lifted up to me her mouth, all stained with blackberries like any school-girl's. I kissed her; a long contented sigh escaped her. "We have fought against it," she whispered.

"Yes, dearest, we have fought against it."

A rabbit popped out into the road; seeing us, it doubled and scuttled back into the hedge. The smoke of a cottage drifted up in spirals. We approached it, walking sedate and separate. A young mother, seated on the threshold, was suckling her child. A man, who talked to her while he worked, was trimming a rose-bed. They glanced up at

us with a friendly understanding smile, as much as to say, "We were as you are now last September."

When a corner of the lane had hidden us, I again placed my arm about her. "Tell me, what have you to lose by it?"

"Lose by it?"

"Yes. I know so little of your life. What is he like?"

"My husband?"

She flushed as she named him. I nodded.

"He is kind."

"You always say that."

"I say it because it is all that there is to say. He is a good man, but——"

"And in spite of that *but* you married him."

"No, I was married to him. He was over forty, and I was only eighteen at the time. He was in love with me. My father was a banker; he lent my father money to tide him over a crisis. Then they told me I must marry him. I was only a child."

"And you never loved him? Say you never loved him!"

She raised her head from my shoulder and looked me in the face with her fearless eyes. "I never loved him. I have been a sort of daughter to him. I scarcely knew what marriage meant until—until it was all over. Then for a time I hated him; I felt myself degraded. Dorrie came. I fought against her coming. Then I grew reconciled. I tried to be true to him because he was her father. He made me respect him, because he was so patient. Dante, when I think of him, I become ashamed of what we are doing."

Her nostrils quivered, betraying her suppressed emotion. She had spoken with effort.

"Why did you leave him? Did you intend to go back to him?"

She became painfully confused.

"Why do you put so many questions?" she cried.

"Don't you trust me?"

"Vi, I trust you so much that for you I'm going to

alter all my life. I'm so glad that you too are willing to be daring."

"Then why do you question me?"

"Because I want to be more sure that he has no moral right to you."

"I left him," she said, "because I could no longer refuse him. He was breaking down my resistance with his terrible kindness. If he had only been unjust and had given me some excuse for anger, I could have endured it. But day after day went by with its comfort, and its heartache, and its outward smoothness. And day after day he was looking older and more patient, and making me feel sorrier for him. He got to calling me 'My child.' People said how beautiful we were together. I couldn't bear to stay and watch him humbling himself and breaking his heart about me. So I asked him to let me go traveling with Dorrie. He let me go, thinking that absence and a change of scene might teach me how to love him."

She hid her face against me. It was burning.

"He thinks you are coming back again?"

"He thinks so in every letter he writes. I thought so too when I went away."

"Vi, you never wear a wedding ring. Why is that if you meant to return to him?"

"I wanted to be young just for a little while. They made me a woman when I was only a child."

"And that was why you taught Dorrie to call you Vi?"

The pity of it got me by the throat. I kissed her eyes as she leant against me. "Poor girl, then let us forget it."

She struggled feebly, making a half-hearted effort to tear herself away. "But we can't forget it," she whispered. "We can't, however we try. There's Dorrie. He loves her terribly. He would give me anything, except Dorrie."

"And we both love Dorrie," I said; "we could never do anything that would spoil her life—that would make her ashamed of us one day. You're trembling like a leaf, Vi. You mustn't look afraid of me."

Gradually she nestled closer in my embrace. It was not

me that she had feared, but consequences. We became sparing in our words; words stated things too boldly.

Coming to the end of the lane, we sauntered out on to a broad white road. It wound across long flat marshes where the wind from the sea is never quiet. The marshes are intersected with dikes and ditches, dotted with wind-breaks for the cattle, and bridged here and there with planks. One can see for miles. There is nothing to break the distance save square Norman towers of embowered churches in solitary hamlets and oddly barrel-shaped wind-mills with sails turning, for all the world like stout giants, gesticulating and pummeling the sky. Here the orchestra of nature is always practising; its strings, except when a storm is brewing, are muted. From afar comes the constant bass of the sea, striking the land in deep arpeggios. Drawing nearer is the soprano humming of the wind or the staccato cry of some startled bird. Then comes a multitude of intermittent soloists,—frogs croaking, reeds rustling, cattle lowing, the rumbling wheels of a wagon. They clamor in subdued ecstasy, now singly and now together. Through all their song runs the murmuring accompaniment of water lapping.

In gleaming curves across this green wilderness flow fresh-water lagoons and rivers which are known as the Broads. Dotted with water-lilies, barriered with bulrushes, they reflect the sky's vast emptiness. Brimming their channels they slip over into the meadows, flashing like quick-silver through ashen sedges.

The sun had vanished. The lip of the horizon was scarlet. The dust of twilight was drifting down. In this primitive spaciousness and freedom one's thoughts expanded.

"Vi," I whispered, "we're two sensible persons. Of what have we to be afraid? Only ourselves."

"There's the future."

"The future doesn't belong to us. We have the present. All our lives we've wanted to be happy. Don't let's spoil our happiness now that we have it. Just for to-night we'll

forget you're married. We'll be lovers together—as alone as if no one else was in the world.”

“And afterwards?”

“Afterwards I'll wait for you. Afterwards can take care of itself.”

The misshapen shadow of sin which had followed and stood between us, holding us at arm's length, awkward and embarrassed, was banished. If this was sin, then wrongdoing was lovely.

We began to talk of how everything had happened—how, out of the great nothingness of the unknown, we had been flung together. How easy it would have been for us to have lived out our lives in ignorance of one another and therefore free from this temptation. We justified ourselves in the belief that our meeting had been fated. It could not have been avoided. We were pawns on a chess-board, manipulated by the hand of an unseen player. We had tried to escape one another and had been forced together against our wills. The outcome of the game did not come within the ruling of our decision.

The theory brought re-assurance. It excused us. We were not responsible. Then my mind fled back to my mother. She and my father had had these same thoughts as they had wandered side by side through these same fields and hedges. Why had I been brought back to the country of their courting to pass through their ordeal?

Night was coming down, covering up landmarks. Darkness lent our actions modesty; they lost something of their sharpened meaning because we could not see ourselves acting. We lived unforgettable moments. Passing over narrow plank-bridges from meadow to meadow, we seemed to be traveling out of harsh reality into a world which was dream-created.

She carried her hat in her hand. A soft wind played in her hair and loosened it in places. Her filmy white dress was all a-flutter. Mists began to rise from the marshlands, making us vague to one another. Traveling out of the east swam the harvest moon, nearing its fullness.

"Vi," I whispered, taking both her hands in mine, "you don't know yourself—you're splendid."

She laughed up into my eyes with elfin daring and abandon.

"You're the kind of woman for whom a man would willingly die."

"I ought to know that," she mocked me, "for one tried."

"If this were five hundred years ago, do you know what I'd do to-night?"

"It isn't five hundred years ago—that makes all the difference. But, if it were, what would you do?"

"I'd ride off with you."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't."

"I should. I shouldn't care what happened a week later. They might kill me like a robber. It wouldn't matter—a week alone with you would have been worth it."

"But you wouldn't," she insisted; "you wouldn't ride off with me."

"Shouldn't I? And why?"

She freed her hands from mine and placed her arms about my neck. The laughter had gone from her face.

"Dear Dante, you wouldn't do it, because *you* are *you*."

The burning thoughts I had had died down. We wandered on in silence.

Ahead of us a flickering light sprang up. Out of curiosity we went towards it. We found ourselves treading a rutted field-path which led back in the direction of the main road. Out of the mist grew up a clump of marsh-poplars. The light became taller and redder. We saw that it was the beginning of a camp-fire. Over the flames hung a stooping figure.

"Good-evening."

The figure turned. It was that of a shriveled mummy of a woman—gray-haired, fantastic, bent, with face seamed and lined from exposure. A yellow shawl covered her head and shoulders. She held a burning twig in her hand, with which she was lighting her pipe.

"Good-evening, mother. Good luck to you."

"Nowt o' luck th' day, lad," she grumbled. "All the folks is in the fields at th' 'arvest."

We seated ourselves at the blaze. She went back into the darkness. We heard the snapping of branches. She returned out of the clump of poplars with a companion; each of them was carrying a bundle of dead wood for fuel. Her companion was a younger woman of about thirty. She nodded to us with a proud air of gipsy defiance and sat herself down on the far side of the fire, holding her face away from the light of the flames. The one glimpse I had had of her had shown me that she was handsome.

"There's bin nowt o' luck th' day," the older woman continued. "They hain't got their wage for th' 'arvest yet and they be too cumbered wi' work for fortune-tellin'."

"Do you tell fortunes?" asked Vi.

"Do I tell fortunes!" the crone repeated scornfully. "I should think I did tell fortunes. Every kind o' folk comes ter me wot wants ter read the future. Farmers whose sheep is dyin'. Wimmen as wants childen and hasn't got 'em. Gals as is goin' ter have childen and oughtn't ter have 'em. Wives whose 'usbands don't love 'em. Lovers as want ter get married, but shouldn't. Lovers as should get married, but don't want ter. They all comes to their grannie. I've seen a lot o' human natur' in my day, I 'ave."

"And what do you tell them?" asked Vi.

"I tell 'em wot's preparin' for or agen 'em. I read th' stars and I warn 'em."

"Can they escape by taking your advice?"

"That's more'n I can say. Thar was Joe Moyer, wot was hanged at Norwich for murthering 'is sweetheart. I telt 'im 'is fortune a year ago come St. Valentine's Day. 'Joe,' says I, 'your 'and'll be red before the poppies blow agen and you neck'll be bruk before th' wheat is ripe. Leave off a-goin' wi' 'er,' says I. And the lassie a-standin' thar by 'is side, she laughs at her grannie. But it all come true, wot I telt 'im."

"Could you read the stars for me?" asked Vi.

Her voice was so thin and eager that it pierced me like a knife. I quivered with fearful anticipation. All our future might depend on what this hag by the roadside might say. I did not want to hear her. She might release terror from the ghost-chamber of conscience. However much we scoffed at her words, they would influence our actions and haunt our minds. Who could say, perhaps Joe Moyer would never have murdered his sweetheart and would not have been hanged at Norwich, if she hadn't suggested his crime.

"Vi," I said sternly, "you don't believe in fortune-telling. We must be going; it's getting late."

"Hee-hee-hee!" the gipsy tittered, "if she don't believe in fortune-tellin', we knows who do. Come, don't be afeard, me dearie. Cross me 'and wi siller and I'll read the stars for 'ee."

Vi crossed her palm with a shilling. The gipsy flung fresh twigs on the fire, that she might study the lines in Vi's hands more clearly. As the flames shot up, they illumined the other woman. Her features were strongly Romany, dark and fierce and shy. Somewhere I had seen them; their memory was pleasant. She regarded me fixedly, as though in a trance, across the fire. She too was trying to remember. Then, rising noiselessly, she stole like a panther into the poplars away from the circle of light. From out there in the darkness I felt that her eyes were still watching.

The old fortune-teller had flung back her shawl from her head. Her grizzled hair broke loose about her shoulders. She was peering over Vi's hand, tracing out the lines with the stem of her foul pipe. Every now and then she paused to ask a whispered question or make a whispered statement. Now she would look up at the stars, and now would pucker her brows. Her head was near to Vi's. The flames jumped up and showed their faces clearly: the one white and pure, and crowned with gold; the other cunning, mahogany-colored, and witch-like. The flames died down; the shadows danced in again.

I drew nearer and heard the gipsy muttering, "You was born under Venus, dearie. Love'll be the makin' o' yer, an' love'll be the ruin o' yer. You'll always be longin' an' longin' an' lookin' for the face o' 'im as is comin'. You're married, dearie, but it warn't to the right 'un, and yer've 'ad childen by 'un. Cross me 'and wi' siller, dearie. Cross me 'and wi' siller. I can't see plain. That's better. Now I see un. 'E's comin', dearie, and 'e'll be tall and masterfu', yer'll 'ave ter sin ter get 'un. Aye, it's all writ 'ere, but it gets mazed—the lines rin t'gether."

She dragged Vi's hand lower to the ground, nearer the fire. She was excited and clearly puzzled. She kept on croaking out what she had said already, "Yer'll 'ave ter sin ter get 'un. It's all writ 'ere. Aye, but it can't be—it can't be for sartin. It gets all mazed and tangled."

She turned her head, blinking across the blaze to where her companion had been sitting.

"Lil, Lil," she cried hoarsely, "come 'ere. I can't see plain. Young eyes is better."

Lil emerged out of the shadows, treading as softly as retribution following temptation. She bent over the hand, unraveling the lines to which the fortune-teller pointed with her pipe-stem.

Lil! Lil! Where had I heard that name before? The wind rustled the leaves of the poplars and caused the ash of the fire to scatter.

"Whenever he hears your voice, it shall speak to him of me. If he goes where you do not grow, oh, grass, then the trees shall call him back. If he goes where you do not grow, oh, trees, then the wind shall tell him. His hand shall be as ours, against the works of men. When he hears your voices, he shall turn his face from walls and come back."

"Do you want to know the future?" she asked, peering into Vi's face gravely.

Vi hesitated. "Is it so terrible?" she whispered.

"Not terrible as we gipsies reckon it; but sweet and dangerous and reckless, and it ends in——"

"Lilith."

I caught her by the wrist. She shot upright and faced me.

"Don't you know me? I'm Dante—Dante Cardover."

Vi had sunk upon her knees and stared up at us, steadying herself with her hands. The old hag gazed angrily from behind Lilith, stretching out her long thin neck.

"I remember you, brother," said Lilith. "You are one of us. I knew that one day you would hear us calling."

"Wot did 'ee see in the lady's 'and?"

The fortune-teller laid a skinny claw on Lilith's shoulder; her voice quavered with eagerness.

"I will not tell," said Lilith.

"Did 'ee see——?"

Lilith clapped her hand over the woman's mouth. "You shan't tell, grannie," she said; "it's not good to tell."

Down the field-track came the creaking sound of wheels. I looked up and saw through the poplars the swinging lanterns of a caravan.

Vi touched me on the arm. She was unnerved and trembling. "Take me home, Dante."

I turned to Lilith. "Who is that?"

"G'liath."

"Where'll you be camping to-morrow? At Woadley Ham?"

A cloud passed over her face. "We never camp there, now."

The crone broke in with a spiteful titter: "But we used ter, until she wouldn't let us."

Lilith spoke hastily. "We're going to Yarminster Fair. We get there to-morrow."

"Then I'll see you there," I told her.

The caravan had come to a halt. I could see the tall form of G'liath moving about the horses. I did not want to meet him just then. Skirting the encampment, we hurried off across fields to the highroad.

A sleepy irritable landlady opened the door to Vi. By the time I had walked down the High Street to the shop,

it was nearly midnight. Ruthita was sitting up for me; my grandmother had been in bed two hours. She eyed me curiously. "You had a long walk," she said.

"Yes, longer than we expected." I spoke brusquely. I was afraid she would question me.

At the top of the stairs, just as I was entering my room, she stole near to me.

"Dante, ar'n't you going to kiss me good-night?"

I was bending perfunctorily over her lifted face, when I saw by the light of the candle in my hand that her eyes were red.

"Ruthie, you little goose, you've been crying. What've you been crying about?"

"I've not," she denied indignantly, and broke from me.

After she had entered her room I tiptoed down the passage and listened outside her door.

In the stillness of the house I could hear her sobbing.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WAY OF ALL FLESH

"FOR good luck's sake smile, Ruthita," said my grandmother. "There you've sat all through breakfast lookin' like a week o' Sundays, with your face as long as a yard o' pump water. What's the matter with you, child? Ain't you well?"

I saw the brightness come into Ruthita's eyes and the lashes tremble. I knew by the signs that directly she heard her own voice she would begin to cry, so I answered for her.

"I can tell you what's the matter. I upset her last night. It was nearly twelve when I got home from my walk with Mrs. Carpenter. Ruthie'd got herself all worked up. Thought we'd been getting drowned again or something, didn't you, Ruthie? It was too bad of me to keep her sitting up so late."

A heavy silence fell. Ruthita dropped her eyes, trying to recover her composure. My grandmother's face masked itself in a non-committal stare. She gazed past me out of the window, and seemed to hold her breath; only the faint tinkling of the gold chain against the jet of her bodice, told how her breath came and went. She had placed her hand on the coffee-pot as I began to speak. When I ended, it stayed there motionless. From the bake-house across the courtyard came the bump, bang, bump of the bakers pounding the dough into bread.

"So you stayed out with Mrs. Carpenter till nearly twelve?"

My grandmother never used dialect when she wished to be impressive. Her tones were icily refined and haughty—

I recognized them as belonging to her company manners. She could be crushingly aloof and dignified when her sense of the moralities was offended. She had practised her talent for "settin' folks down and makin' 'em feel like three penn'orth o' happence" to some purpose on grizzled sea-captains.

"Yes, till nearly twelve. It was pretty late, wasn't it? We met some interesting people camping on the marshlands—old friends of mine and Ruthita's."

"Indeed! And you walked back from the Broads about midnight with a married woman."

"Oh, no. It wasn't much after ten when we started back. Time passed quickly; we didn't realize how late it was getting. It didn't matter, except for Ruthita. It was bright moonlight. The country looked perfect."

"It must ha' done," said my grandmother sarcastically.

"It did. Some day we must try it all together."

"And who were your interesting friends? Respectable people, no doubt, to be camping on the marshlands."

"They weren't respectable. They were gipsies." Then, turning to Ruthita, "It was Lilith that we met. You remember Lilith of Epping Forest—that time we ran away to get married. Fancy meeting her after all these years! And just as I left, I saw G'liath drive up. I could swear it was the same old caravan, Ruthie."

Curiosity and love of romance melted my grandmother's reserve.

"G'liath! Why, that's the gipsy family to which Sir Charles's mother belonged. They must be kind o' relatives o' yours."

"I suppose they must. I never thought of that. I'll have to ask Lilith about it. They were on their way to Yarminster Fair. We'll run over and see them."

Just then the errand boy, who was minding the shop, tapped at the keeping-room door and handed in a note for me. I saw that it was unstamped and addressed in a handwriting that I did not recognize.

"Where did this come from?"

"It war left jist nar acrost the counter by a sarvant-gal."

"All right."

Ruthita was telling my grandmother all that she could remember of Lilith. I ripped open the envelope and read,

Something has happened. Must see you at once. Come as soon as you can. Vi.

"Who's your letter from?"

"From Mrs. Carpenter."

"Mrs. Carpenter again! What does she want? It's not more'n nine hours since you saw her."

"She wants my advice on—on a business matter."

"Humph! I 'ope she may profit by it."

As I was sauntering out of the shop Ruthita called after me in her high clear voice, "Going to take me to Yarminster to-day, Dante?"

"Don't know yet. I'll tell you later."

Until I reached the top of the street I strolled jauntily; I was sure I was being watched. I had left an atmosphere of jealous annoyance and baffled suspicion behind. It was absurd to be nursed and guarded by affectionate relatives in the way I was.

I was puzzled by Vi's note. I worked out all kinds of conjectures as I jostled my way through fisher-girls and sailors up the High Street.

I was shown into the room at the back of the black flint house, which overlooked the sea. The windows were open wide; wind fluttered the curtains. Breakfast things were only partially cleared from the table. Upstairs I could hear Dorrie's piping voice and, now and then, could catch a phrase of what she was saying.

"Let me thee him too, Vi. Oh, pleath. No, I don't want to play wiv Annie. I want to play wiv Dante."

Then I heard the thump, thump, thump of Dorrie stumping from stair to stair by way of protest, and the heavy step of Annie taking her forcibly to the kitchen.

Vi descended a moment later. She entered without eagerness, shutting the door carefully behind her. There was never anything of hurry or neglect in her appearance; she always looked fresh and trimly attired. The high color in her usually pale cheeks was the only sign of perturbation.

She crossed the room towards me with a slow, swaying motion, and halted a foot away, holding out her hand. I took it in mine, pressing it gently. Her mouth was quivering. She was making an effort to be formally polite and was not succeeding. The soft rustling of her skirts, the slow rise and fall of her bosom, her delicate fragrance and timid beauty—everything about her was bewilderingly feminine. What arguments, I wondered, what campaigns of caution, what capitulations of wild desires to duty were going on behind that smooth white forehead? My grip on her hand tightened; I drew her to me. Her cold remoteness added to my yearning.

"What is it? Why did you send for me? You've changed since last night."

She drew her hand free from mine. I saw that, for the first time since I had known her, she was wearing a band of gold upon her wedding-finger.

"It's all over, Dante."

She whispered the words, wringing her hands and staring away from me out to sea. I slipped my arm about her shoulder. "It can never be all over, dearest."

For answer she handed me a letter. It bore a United States stamp and was addressed to her in a bold, emphatic, perpendicular hand which revealed the writer's vigorous determination of character.

"From my husband. Read it."

Standing a little apart from her at the window, I drew out a carefully folded letter. It was dated from Sheba, Massachusetts, nine days previous to its arrival. While I read it, I watched her stealthily, how she stood charmingly irresolute, twisting the gold-band off and on her finger.

My dearest Vi:

I have written you many times, asking you to fix definitely the day of your return. You've put me off with all kinds of excuses. Latterly you have not even referred to my question. My dear child, don't think I blame you; you probably have your own reasons for what you are doing. But people are beginning to talk about us here. For your own sake you ought to return. We've always tried to play fair by one another. You were always game, Vi; and now it's up to you.

I'm lonely. I want my little Dorrie. Most of all I want my wife. I can't stand this absence much longer. On receipt of this send me a cable "Coming," followed by the date of your sailing. If I don't receive such a cable within ten days of mailing this letter, I shall jump on a boat and come over. I don't distrust you, but I'm worn out with waiting. Can't you understand how I want you? Nothing in the world matters to me, my child, except you.

Your affectionate husband,

Randall.

I re-folded it methodically and returned it to the envelope. I tried to picture this man who had sent it. He was manifestly elderly. Probably he was portly, a trifle pompous and genially paternal in his manners. What volumes his trick of calling her "my child" revealed concerning their relations. I contrasted him with Vi. Vi with her eager youth, her passion to taste life's rapture, her slim white body so alluring and so gracious, her physical fineness, her possibilities for bestowing and receiving natural joy. If I let her go, she would slowly lose her zest for life. She would forget that she was a woman and would sink prematurely into stolid middle-age. Her possibilities of motherhood would slip from her untaken and never to be renewed. The little rascals, with golden hair and features which should perpetuate her beauty, would never be born to her. Those children should be hers and mine. *Hers and mine.* How the words beat upon my

brain! They were like the fists of little children, battering against the closed doors of existence. It was monstrous that the justice of this husband's claim to her should be based on his injustice in having married her.

Again I formed my mental picture of him, formed it with the cruel sarcasm of youth. His body was deteriorated; his skin puckered and yellow; the fine lines of suppleness and straightness gone; the muscles flabby and jaded. Then I looked at her: gold and ivory, with poppies for a mouth. Sweet and nobly chaste. A woman to set a man on fire—to drive him to the extremes of sorrow or gladness. A woman to sin for.

I turned from the window and took one step towards her. I could feel her body throbbing against mine. The fierce sweet ecstasy of my delight hurt her. I saw nothing but her eyes. All else in the world was darkness.

"Let me go," she panted.

"Do you want to go?" I whispered.

She sank her head on my shoulder. Her arms were about my neck. I could only see her golden hair. Her answer came to me broken and muffled. "No, no, no."

I carried her to the sofa and knelt beside her.

"You won't ever despise me, will you?"

How absurd her question sounded.

Without any reference to our ultimate purpose, we set about making our plans. We must get away from Ransby. We must not be seen together any more that day. We would meet at the station that evening, and travel up to London together by the train leaving Ransby at six-thirty-eight. Our plans went no further.

Now that all had been arranged, a new embarrassment arose between us—a sweet shamefulness. She clung to me, yet she cast down her eyes, her cheeks encrimsoned, not daring to look me in the face. We touched one another shyly and shuddered at the contact. Our hearts were too full for words, our thoughts too primitively intimate to be expressed. The veils had dropped from our eyes. The mystery of mysteries lay exposed. We saw one another,

natural in our passions—exiles from society. No artificial restraints stood between us; in our conduct with one another we were free to be governed by our own desires.

A scurry of little feet in the passage. The sound of heavier ones pursuing. We sprang apart. Dorrie entered, running with her arms stretched out towards me. "Catch me, Dante. Don't let her get me."

The rueful face of Annie appeared in the doorway; her plump arms covered to the elbows with flour. "If 'ee please, mum," she said, "it warn't no fault o' mine. She nipped out afore I could get a-holt o' her, while I war a-makin' o' the pudden."

"You're juth horwid," cried Dorrie. "Go 'way. I want to thpeak to Dante."

She scrambled on my knee, clutching tightly to my coat till Annie had vanished. Then she tossed her curls out of her eyes, and told me all that she and Ruthita had done together on the previous evening. While she was talking, I watched Vi, trying to realize the seemingly impossible truth that she had promised herself to me, and would soon be mine. A host of bewildering images rushed through my mind as I gazed into the future. I was amazed at myself that I should feel no fear of the step which we contemplated.

"Old thtupid," cried Dorrie in an aggrieved voice, "you weren't lithening."

She smoothed her baby fingers up and down my face, coaxing me to give her my attention.

"Sorry, little lady, but I must be going. You must tell me all about it some other time."

"All wite," she acquiesced contentedly; "it's a pwomith."

Vi accompanied me to the door.

"To-night."

"To-night."

"What wath you thaying?" asked Dorrie.

"Nothing, my darling."

My grandmother was sitting behind her counter, knitting, when I entered. She sank her chin and looked at me

humorously over her spectacles. "Well, my man of business, did she take your advice?"

"Of course. Why shouldn't she? She's seen my grannie, and knows how she's profited by it."

"Clever boy," she retorted. "Who made your shirt? When a man of business is born among the Cardovers, pears'll grow on pines. Look at your father. Look at the Spuffler. Look at yourself. I hope she won't act on it. What was it?"

"Can't tell you now. I find I've got to run up to London to-night and I've promised to take Ruthie to Yarminster. There's only just time."

"What's takin' you to London? You didn't say anythin' about it this mornin'." She dropped her knitting in her lap. "Dante, is it anythin' to do with her?"

"Partly."

She beckoned me nearer to her. I leant over the counter. She glanced meaningly towards the door of the keeping-room. I stooped lower till our heads nearly touched. "You'd better stay there, laddie," she whispered. "I've been thinkin' and usin' me eyes. This ain't no place fur you at present. She's gettin' too fond of you and you of her. I know." She nodded. "I've been through it. I watched your pa at it."

"At what?"

"At what you and Mrs. Carpenter are doin'. Don't pretend you're a fool, Dante, 'cause you're not—and neither is your old grannie."

Just then Ruthie looked out of the keeping-room. I was glad of the excuse to cut this dangerous conversation short. "Hurry up, Ruthie; get on your togs. I'm going to drive you over to Yarminster."

When she had gone, my grandmother turned to me again. "And there's another of 'em. Lovers can't keep their secrets to theirselves nohow—they give theirselves away with every breath. Did ye see the way she flushed wi' pleasure? She's a tender little maid. If you made her unhappy, though she's none o' my body, I'd never forgive

ye, Dante. If you don't intend to marry 'er, be careful."

"Rubbish," I exclaimed and went out into the street to fetch round a dog-cart from the livery-stables.

"Aye, rubbish is well enough," was my grandmother's final retort; "but broken eggs can't be mended. No more can broken hearts."

There was just room enough on the front-seat to take the two of us. As I drove down the street I saw Ruthita come out of the shop and stand waiting on the pavement. She looked modest and pretty as a sprig of lavender. There was always something quaintly virginal about her, as though she had stepped out of an old English love-song. Her eyes were unusually bright this morning with the pleasure of anticipation. With subtle flattery, she had put on one of the gowns I had bought her. It was her way of saying, "This day is to be mine and yours."

"Don't I do you proud?" she laughed, using one of Vi's Americanisms.

"No, you don't," I said, with pretended harshness, "I can't think where you got such a dunducketty old dress from."

"A man gave it me. Didn't he show bad taste?"

"He showed himself a perfect ass. Now, if I were to buy you a dress, Ruthie, which of course I shan't——"

"Here, get off with you, you rascals. What're you a-doin', blockin' up my pavement?"

Grandmother Cardover stood in the doorway, her hands folded beneath her black satin apron, her keys jangling. The gray cork-screw curls from under her cap were wobbling; her plump little body was shaking with enjoyment. All her crossness and caution on Vi's account were gone at seeing Ruthita and myself together. We started up at a smart trot. As we turned the corner into the High Street, we looked back. She was still there, gazing after us.

By the road which follows the coast, Yarminster is eight miles from Ransby. I turned inland by a roundabout route; I wanted to pass through Woadley.

My spirits ran high with the thought of what was to

happen shortly. I was in a mood to be gay. Clouds were flying high. The country lay windswept and golden in the sunshine. The air had the sharp tang of autumn—the acrid fragrance which foretells the decay of foliage. A pleasant melancholy lurked in the reds and yellows of woods and hedges. Tops of trees were already growing thin of leaves where the gales had harried them. Pasturing in harvested fields, flocks of sheep lent a touch of grayness to the landscape. Here and there overhead gulls hovered, or slid down the sky on poised wings, as though brooding on the summer that was gone.

Ruthita and I spoke of Lilith, recalling childhood's days. We laughed over our amazement at discovering that her back was no longer humpy—that her baby had left her. Then we fell to wondering whether she had ever been married and what was her story. Our conversation became intimate and confessional. I had never known much of Ruthita's secret thoughts.

"Dante," she cried, "why did they leave us to find out everything?"

I slowed the horse down to a walk. "I know what you mean, Ruthie. They brought us up on fables. They left us to fight with all kinds of fantastic imaginings. They allowed us to infer that so many things were shameful. D'you remember what a fuss they made when they found that the Bantam had kissed you?"

She nodded, casting down her eyes. "I've never got over it. It's made me awkward with men—self-conscious and afraid of . . ."

"And yet they were kind to us, Ruthie."

"But they never treated us honestly," she said sadly.

That same intense look, a look almost of hunger, which transformed her, came into her face—the look which the flash-light had revealed to me that night on the denes. Sudden fear of what we might say next made me shake up the horse. The jolting of the wheels prevented us from conversing save by raising our voices.

We passed a man on the road. He shouted after us.

At first I thought he was chaffing. He kept on shouting.

"Why don't you stop?" said Ruthita. "We may have dropped something."

We had turned a bend. I looked back, but could not see him. I halted until he should come up. A big-framed man in a shooting-jacket, gaiters, and knickerbockers came swinging round the corner. I was surprised to recognize in him Lord Halloway.

"Halloa," he shouted, "you're going in my direction. Would you mind giving me a lift as far as Woadley?"

"Not at all," I said. "This horse is restive. I can't leave the reins. I suppose you can lower the back-seat without help."

He drew level on the far-side from me and stood with his hand resting on the splashboard, gazing at Ruthita. "My sister," I said shortly.

While he lowered the back and drew out the seat, he explained himself. "I'm going to Woadley to look after some farms my father owns round there." What he was really saying was, "I'm not going to try to cut you out with Sir Charles, so you needn't fear me."

His manner was friendly. He had gained a high color with his walking. He looked brilliantly handsome and manly, with just that touch of indolence about him that gave him his charm. Without being warned, no one would have guessed that he was a rake. In his presence even I disbelieved half the wild tales of dissipation I had heard narrated of him. Yet, when my distrust of him was almost at rest, he would arouse it with his inane, high-pitched laugh.

When he had clambered in and we had started, I began to tell him, for the sake of conversation, where we were traveling. At the mention of Lilith, he interrupted.

"Lilith! Lilith! Seem to remember the name. Was she ever in these parts before? There was a little girl named Lilith, who used to camp with the Goliaths, the gipsies, on Woadley Ham. They haven't been there for years. I recall her distinctly. She was wild and dark. I used to watch

her breaking in ponies when I was a boy stopping with Sir Charles."

"She must be the same."

"You might tell her that you met me, when you see her," he said. "She was the pluckiest little horsewoman for her age I ever saw. She could ride anything. I can see her now, gripping a young hunter I had with her brown bare legs, fighting his head off. It's odd that you should have mentioned her."

He tailed off into his giggling girlish laugh.

Little by little he commenced to address his remarks exclusively to Ruthita. This was natural, for I could not turn round to converse with him because of attending to the horse. I observed him out of the corner of my eye, and began to understand the secret of his power over women. For one thing he talked entirely to a woman, bestowing on her an intensity of attention which many would consider flattering. Then again he put a woman at her ease, drawing her out and speaking of things which were within her depth. Most of the topics which he drifted into were personal. When he mentioned himself, he lowered his voice as if he were confessing. When he mentioned her, his tones became earnest.

I was surprised to see how Ruthita, usually so reticent, lowered her guard to his attack. She twisted round on her seat, that she might watch him. Her face grew merry and her eyes twinkled with fun and laughter. She was being, what she had declared she never was—natural with a man.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw one thing which displeased me immensely. With apparent unconsciousness, Halloway's arm was slipping farther and farther along the back of the seat against which Ruthita rested. A little more, and it would have encircled her. But before that was accomplished, he stopped short, leaving nothing to complain of. He was simply steadying himself in a jolting dog-cart.

We entered Woadley and passed the tall gates of the

Park. I had a glimpse of the Hall through the trees, and the peacocks strutting where the gardens began and the meadowland left off. I smiled to myself as I wondered what would happen if Sir Charles should meet Halloway and myself together. Two miles out of Woadley Ruthita and my cousin were still industriously chatting. I had my suspicions as to the urgency of his errand. Then the arm slid an inch further along the back-rail of the seat. That inch made his attitude barely pardonable. I reined in.

"Didn't you say you were going to Woadley?"

"Why, yes," he laughed. "I have to get out at the next cross-road and walk. The farms are over in that direction."

He swept a belt of woodland vaguely. He lied consummately. His face told me nothing.

"Well, here's the next cross-road."

My manner was churlish. He refused to acknowledge anything hostile in my tones.

"I'm awfully grateful to you," he said; "you've saved me a long walk and I've enjoyed your company immensely." As he spoke the last words he smiled directly into the eyes of Ruthita. "I shall hope to meet Miss Cardover again—perhaps at Oxford."

I did not think it necessary to tell him that Ruthita's surname was not Cardover but Favart. We watched him stride away, clean-limbed and splendid—a man who had sinned discreetly and bore no physical marks of his shortcomings.

At last Ruthita spoke. "I don't think I like him."

"You didn't let him know it."

"He made me forget. He made me remember I was a woman. No man's ever spoken to me as he spoke."

"He's a clever fellow to make you forget the esplanade and Lottie."

"Now you're angry," she laughed, and snuggled closer.

We entered the old marketplace of Yarminster where the Fair was being held. Leaving our horse at *The Anchor* to be baited, we threaded our way between booths and whirligo-rounds. Presently I heard a familiar cry, "Two

shies a penny. Two shies a penny. Every ball 'its a cocoanut. Down she goes. Walk up. Walk up. Two shies a penny."

Dodging up and down behind the pitch, was G'liath, not much altered. The gaudy woman was absent; it was Lilith who was serving out the balls to the country bumpkins.

"Here's Ruthita," I said. "You remember the little girl in the Forest?"

She went on catching the wooden balls which G'liath returned to her. Trade was busy. Between reiterating his call, she conversed with us.

"I remember. (Two shies a penny). It doesn't seem long ago. (Every ball 'its a cocoanut. Walk up). How long is it?"

"The best part of fourteen years."

It was difficult to carry on a conversation under the circumstances.

"I wanted to ask you about last night," I whispered. "When'll you be free?"

"Not until midnight."

I saw Ruthita listening, so I changed the subject. "By the way, we met someone who knew you when you were a girl at Woadley. He wanted to be remembered to you."

Her handsome face darkened. "A man?" she asked.

"My cousin, Lord Halloway."

She halted and looked round on me in proud astonishment. "Oh!" she gasped, and renewed her calling.

Ruthita broke in to tell her of my good fortune. She did not pay much attention at first. Then it seemed to dawn on her. "So he's out of it, and you'll be master at Woadley Hall?"

"Yes." I lowered my voice. "And then you must come back to Woadley Ham. You were good to me once, Lilith."

"I never forget." There was a look of the old kindness in her eyes as she said it. "When you need me, I shall come."

The crowd pressed about us, curious to overhear, sur-

prised at seeing gentlefolks so chatty with a gipsy hussy. She signed to us to go. We drew off a few paces, looking on, recalling that night at Epping, when we fled from Dot-and-Carry-One and came to G'liath's encampment.

Shortly after that the clock of St. Nicholas boomed three, and we departed.

CHAPTER IX

THE ELOPEMENT

RUTHITA was anxious to accompany me to the station.

"I don't want you," I told her. "Women always make a fuss over partings."

"But not sensible women," she protested, smiling. "Let me come. There's a dear."

"You'll try to kiss me. You'll make a grab at my neck just as the train is moving. I shall feel embarrassed. You'll probably slip off the platform and get both your legs cut off. A nice memory to take with me to London! No, thank you."

"But I won't try to kiss you, and I won't grab at your neck. I'll be most careful about my legs. And I don't think it's nice of you to mention them so callously, Dante."

"I always tell folks," put in my grandmother, "that, if there wer'n't no partin's, there'd be no meetin's. It's just come and go in this life. If he don't want you, my dear, don't bother 'im."

"But he does want me," Ruthita persisted. "I've always seen him off. I used to run beside the trap till I was ready to drop when Uncle Obad drove him away to the Red House. He's only making fun."

"No, really, Ruthie, I'd much rather say good-by to you here in the shop."

"If you're going to catch the six-thirty-eight, you'll have to run," said my grandmother.

Ruthita looked hurt. She could not understand me. She felt that something was wrong. I picked up my bag. They hurriedly embraced and followed me out on to the pavement to watch me down the road. I looked back.

There they stood waving and crying after me, "Good-by. God bless you. Good-by."

In passing the chemist's shop I glanced in at the clock. It was five minutes faster than my watch. I turned into the High Street at something between a trot and a walk.

On entering the station I saw that the London train was ready to depart. The guard had the flag in his hand and the whistle to his lips, about to give the signal. The porters were banging the doors of the carriages. I had yet to buy my ticket. Rushing to the office, I pushed my money through. "'Fraid you won't get the six-thirty-eight," said the clerk.

I reached the barrier, where the collector was standing, just as the guard blew his whistle.

"Too late," growled the collector, closing the gate in my face with all the impersonal incivility of a man whose action is supported by law.

"There's a lady and a little girl on board," I panted; "they're expecting me."

"Sorry," said the man; "should 'ave got 'ere sooner."

Just then the train began to move and I recognized the uselessness of further argument. As the tail of it vanished out of the station, the collector slid back the gate. Now that there was no danger of my disobeying him, he could afford to be human. "It's h'orders, yer know, sir, else I wouldn't ha' done it."

Friends who had been seeing their travelers off came laughing and chatting toward the barrier. As the crowd thinned, half way down the platform I caught sight of Vi. She was standing apart, with her hand-baggage scattered beside her in disorder. Dorrie was hanging to her skirts, looking up into her face, asking questions. Neither of them saw me.

"Hulloa!"

When I spoke to her, Vi started. Her eyes brimmed. There shone through her tears a doubtful gladness. "I thought—I thought you wer'n't coming. I thought——"

"Vi dearest! Was that likely?"

Her fingers closed about my arm warningly as I called her dearest. She cast a scared look at Dorrie. "Not before her," she whispered.

I shrugged my shoulders. The position was queer. For a man and a woman in our situation there was no ready-made standard of conduct. I began to feel lost in the freedom we were making for ourselves. There were no landmarks. Even now we were beyond the conventional walls of right and wrong which divide society from the outcast. We were running away to seek our happiness—and we were taking Dorrie!

I began to explain hurriedly how I happened to miss the train.

"Ruthita wanted to come to the station. I lost time in dissuading her. When I got away, I discovered that my watch was slow by five minutes. And then to crown all, when I could have caught the train, the man at the gate . . ."

"It doesn't matter," she said generously. "How long before the next train starts?"

"About half-an-hour."

"That'll do nearly as well. My boxes have gone on, but I can claim them in London."

"We don't want to stand in this stuffy station," I said. "Let's go for a walk."

She began to speak, and then stopped.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Shan't—shan't we be recognized?"

"Not if we go round the harbor. We shan't be likely to meet anyone there who knows us."

It was odd, this keeping up of respectable appearances to the last. Ruthita, Grandmother Cardover, Sir Charles, my father—all the world would know to-morrow. They would spread their hands before their faces and look shocked, and peek out at us through their fingers.

"No one ever thpeaks to me." Dorrie was reproachfully calling our attention to her presence.

"We'll both thepeak to you now," I said. "Give me your hand, Dorrie."

Leaving our baggage with a porter, we went out of the station to the harbor, which lay just across the station-yard. Vi manœvered herself to the other side of me, so that the child walked between us.

The heavy autumn dusk was falling. Lanterns were being run up the masts. The town shone hospitably with street-lamps. Groping their way round the pier-head came a part of the Scotch herring fleet. We could see how their prows danced and nodded by the way the light from their lamps lengthened and shortened across the water. Soon the ripple against the piles near to where we were standing quickened with the disturbance caused by their advance. Then we heard the creaking of ropes against blocks as sails were lowered.

Leaning against the wall of the quay we watched them, casting furtive glances now and then at the illumined face of the station-clock.

Dorrie asked questions, to which we returned indifferent answers. It had begun to dawn on her that I was going up to London with them. She construed our secretiveness to mean that our plot was for her special benefit; people only acted like that with her when they were concealing something pleasant. Her innocent curiosity embarrassed us.

Why were we going to London? she asked us. We had not dared to answer that question even to one another. For my part I tried not to hear her; she roused doubts—phantoms of future consequence. I pictured the scene of long ago, when Ransby was rather more than twenty years younger, and another man and woman had slipped away unnoticed, daring the world for their love's preservation. Had they had these same thoughts—these hesitations and misgivings? Or had they gone out bravely to meet their destiny, reckless in their certainty of one another?

Behind us, as we bent above the water, rose the shuffling clamor of numberless feet. Up and down the harbor groups of fisher-girls were sauntering abreast, in rows of

three and four. Now and then we caught phrases in broad Scotch dialect. They had been brought down from their homes in the north, many hundreds of them, for the kiping. They paraded bareheaded, with rough woolen shawls across their shoulders, knitting as they walked. I was thankful for them; they distracted attention from ourselves. Vi and I said nothing to one another; our hearts were too full for small-talk. The child was a barrier between us.

A man halted near us. He had a heavy box on his back, covered with American-cloth. He set it down and became busy. In a short time he had lighted a lantern and hung it on a pole. He mounted a stool, from which he could command the crowd, raising the lamp aloft. Fisher-girls, still knitting, stopped in their sauntering and gathered round him. Several smacksmen and sailors, with pipes in their mouths, and hands deep in pockets, loitered up.

The man began to talk, at first at random, like a cheap-jack, trying to catch his hearers' attention with a laugh. Then, when his audience was sufficiently interested, he unrolled a sheet upon which the words of a hymn were printed. He held it before him like a bill-board, so that all could see and the light fell on it. He sang the first verse himself in a strong, gusty baritone. One by one the crowd caught the air and joined in with him.

They sang four verses, each verse followed by a chorus. The man allowed the sheet to drop, and handed the pole with the lantern to a bystander.

His brows puckered. His eyes concentrated. His somewhat brutal jaw squared itself. His face had become impassioned and earnest all of a sudden. It had been coarse and rather stupid before; now a certain eagerness of purpose gave it sharpness. He began to talk with vehemence, making crude, forceful gestures, thrashing the air with his arms, bringing down his clenched right-fist into the open palm of his left-hand when a remark called for emphasis. His thick throat swelled above the red knotted handkerchief which took the place of a collar. He spoke with a kind

of savage anger. He mauled his audience with brutal eloquence. His way of talking was ignorant. He was displeasing, yet compelling. There were fifteen minutes until the train started. I watched him with cynicism as a diversion from my thoughts.

"Brothers and sisters," he shouted, "we are 'ere met in the sight of h'Almighty Gawd. It was 'im as brought us together. Yer didn't know that when yer started out this starlit h'evenin' for yer walk. It was 'im as sent me 'ere ter tell yer this evenin' that the wages o' sin is death. I know wot h'I'm a-saying of, for I was once a sinner. But blessed be Gawd, 'e 'as saved me and washed me white h'in 'is son's precious blood. 'E can do that for you ter-night, an 'e sent me 'ere ter tell yer."

Some of the Cornish Methodists, in Ransby for the her-ring season, began to warm to the orator's enthusiasm. They urged him to further fervor by ejaculating texts and crying, "Amen!" "Blessed be 'is name!" "Glory!" etc.

The man sank his voice from the roaring monotone in which he had started. "The wages o' sin is death," he repeated. "Oh, my friends, h'I speak as a dyin' man to dyin' men. Yer carn't h'escape them wages nohow. The fool 'as said in 'is 'eart, 'There ain't no Gawd.' 'Ave you said that? Wot'll yer say when yer 'ave ter take the wages? Now yer say, 'No one's lookin'. They'll never find out. H'everyone's as bad as I h'am, only they don't let me know it. I'll h'injoy myself. There ain't no Gawd.' I tells yer, my friends, yer wrong. 'E's a-watchin' yer now, lookin' down from them blessed stars. 'E looks inter yer 'eart and sees the sin yer a-meditatin' and a-planning. 'E knows the wages yer'll 'ave ter take for it. 'E sees the conserquences. And the conserquences is death. Death ter self-respec'! Death ter 'uman h'affection! Death ter the woman and children yer love! Death ter 'ope and purity! Damnation ter yer soul! 'Ave yer thought o' that? Death! Death! Death!"

He hissed the words, speaking slower and slower. His voice died away in an awestruck whisper. In the pause

that followed, the quiet was broken by a shrill laugh. All heads turned. On the outskirts of the crowd stood "Lady Halloway." She had evidently been drinking. A foolish smile played about her mouth. Her lips were swollen. She mimicked the evangelist in a hoarse, cracked voice, "Death! Death! Death!"

I signed to Vi. Going first, carrying Dorrie in my arms, I commenced to force a passage. We had become wedged against the wall. Our going caused a ripple of disturbance. Attention was distracted from "Lady Halloway" to ourselves. She turned her glazed eyes on us. Stupid with drink, she did not recognize me at first. I had to pass beneath the lantern quite near her. As the light struck across my face, she saw who I was.

"'E's got another gal," she tittered so all could hear her. "It's easy come and easy go-a. Love 'ere ter-day and thar ter-morrer. Good-evenin', Sir Dante Cardover, that is ter be. And 'oo's yer noo sweet-'art? Is she as pretty h'as me? Let a poor gal 'ave a look at 'er."

I pushed by her roughly. She would have followed, but some of the crowd restrained her. She made a grab at Vi. I could hear Vi's dress rending. "So I ain't good 'nough!" she shouted. "I ain't good 'nough for yer! And 'oo are you ter despise me, I'd like ter h'arsk?"

She said a lot more, but her voice was drowned in a protesting clamor. I turned my head as I crossed the station-yard. Beneath the evangelist's lantern I saw her arms tossing. Her hair had broken loose. Her eyes followed us. I entered the station and saw no more. Not until we had slipped through the barrier on to the platform did we slacken. Even while loathing her for her display of bestiality, my grandmother's words came back to me, "She was as nice and kind a little girl as there was in Ransby, until that rascal, Lord Halloway, ruined her."

We found that the porter, with whom we had left our luggage, had secured three seats for us. Two of them were corners. I took mine with my back to the engine, so that Vi and I sat facing one another. Dorrie sat beside

Vi for a few minutes, uncomfortably, with her legs dangling. Then she slipped to the floor and climbing up my knees, snuggled herself down in my arms.

"We'll have fine timeth in London together, won't we?" she questioned. "I'm tho glad you's toming."

It was strange how difficult I found it to speak to Vi. I wanted to say so much. I knew I ought to say something. Yet all I could think to mention was some reference to what had happened beside the harbor—and that was so contaminating that I wanted to forget it. Luckily, just then, an old countrywoman bundled in with a basket on her arm.

"Gooing ter Lun'non, me dear?" she asked of Vi. "Well, ter be sure, I intend ter goo ter Lun'non some day. I get out at Beccles, the nex' stop." Lowering her voice, "That your little gal, and 'usband, bor? Not your 'usband! Well, 'e do seem fond o' your little gal, now doan't 'e, just the same as if 'e wuz 'er father?"

The train began to move. The lights of Ransby flashed by, twinkling and growing smaller. We thundered across the bridge which separates the Broads from the harbor.

Vi and the countrywoman were talking, or rather the countrywoman was talking and Vi was paying feigned attention. Dorrie, her flaxen curls falling across my shoulder, began to nod. Of the other passengers, one was drowsing and the other, a fierce be-whiskered little man, was reading a paper, leaning forward to catch the glimmering light which fell from the lamp in the center of the carriage. I was left alone with my thoughts.

They were not pleasant. The religious commonsense of the man by the harbor disturbed me. The face of "Lady Halloway" proved the truth of his assertions. His words would not be silenced. Strident and accusing, they rose above the rumbling of the train, and wove themselves into a maddening chorus: "*The wages of sin is death; the wages of sin is death; the wages of sin is death.*" A man whose intellect I despised, to whose opinions I should ordi-

narily pay no attention, had spoken truth—and I had heard it.

At Beccles the train stopped. The countrywoman alighted. The drowsy man woke up and followed her. The fierce little man curled himself up in his corner and spread his paper over his face to shut out the light. There were four hours more until we reached London. The train resumed its journey through the dark.

I dared not stir for fear of waking Dorrie.

"Comfortable, Vi?"

She nodded and leant her face against the cushioned back of the carriage, closing her eyes. I watched her pure profile—the arched eyebrows, the heavy eyelids, the straight nose, the full and pouting mouth, the rounded chin, the long, sensuous curve of the graceful neck. I traced the small blue veins beneath the transparent whiteness of her temples. I studied her beauty, committing it to memory. Then I commenced to compare her with Dorrie, discovering the likeness. I wondered whether I had first felt drawn to her because she was so like Dorrie, or only for herself.

I looked up from Dorrie, and found Vi gazing at me. I had thought her sleeping.

"Just wakened?"

"I've been awake all the time. I've been thinking."

"Of what?"

"Last night. How different it was! We didn't have to hide. No one was looking."

"Then we'll go again to where no one is looking."

"We can't always do that. But I was thinking of something else."

"What was it this time?"

She pressed her cheek against the glass of the window, gazing out into the night. Then she leant over to me, clasping her hands. "How cruel it was, what he said to us!"

"Who?"

"The man there in Ransby."

"But he didn't speak to us. He was one of those people who shout at street-corners because they like to hear their own voices."

"He was speaking to me," she said, "though he didn't know it."

"Vi, you're not growing nervous?"

"That isn't the word. I'm looking forward and thinking how horrid it would be to have to hide always."

"We shan't."

She looked at Dorrie, making no reply.

Presently she spoke again. "Dante, have you ever thought of it? I'm four years older than you are."

"No, I've never thought of it."

"You ought to."

"Why?"

"Because four years makes a lot of difference in a woman. You'll look still young when I'm turning forty."

"Pooh!"

She ignored my attempt to turn from the topic. "If— if we should ever do anything rash, people would say that I was a scheming woman; that I'd taken advantage of you; that, being the elder, I ought to have known better."

The idea of Vi leading me astray was so supremely ridiculous that I laughed outright. Dorrie stirred, and gazed up in my face. "Dear Dante!" she muttered, and sank back again.

"Her father will be waiting for the cable," said Vi.

I wondered if this was the kind of conversation my father and mother had carried on all those years ago when they ran away. I felt that if my arms were only free to place about her, all would be well.

"We shall have to tell him, Vi," I whispered.

She pretended not to hear me. Her eyes were closed. One hand shaded them from the light. She was again playing hide-and-seek with the purpose of our errand.

The rumble of the wheels droned on. I planned for what I would do when the train reached London and the moment of decision should arrive.

Perhaps two hours passed in silence. The glare of London was growing in the distance. Towns and houses became more frequent. One had glimpses of illumined windows and silhouettes against the blinds. Each house meant a problem as large to someone as mine was to me. The fact that life was so teeming and various robbed my crisis of its isolated augustness. Locals met us with a crash like thunder. As we flashed by, I could glance into their carriages and see men and women, all of whom, at some time in their existence, would decide just such problems of love and self-fulfilment—to each one of them the decision would seem vital to the universe, and in each case it would be relatively trivial. How easy to do what one liked unnoticed in such a crowded world! How preposterous that theory of the man by the harbor! As if any God could have time to follow the individual doings of such a host of cheese-mites!

Our fellow-traveler in the corner woke and removed the paper from before his eyes.

"Wife tired?"

"Yes, it's a tedious journey."

It was too much trouble to correct him as to our exact relations.

He cleared the misty panes and looked out at a vanishing station. "Stratford. We'll be there in a quarter of an hour. Live in London?"

"Yes. At least, sometimes."

He commenced to get his baggage together, keeping up his desultory volley of questions.

We entered the last tunnel. I touched Vi's hand. "We're pulling into Liverpool Street. Do you want to claim your boxes to-night or to-morrow?"

"To-morrow'll do," she said.

A porter jumped on the step of our carriage. Our fellow-traveler alighted, refusing his assistance. The man climbed in and, shouldering our luggage, inquired whether we wanted a cab.

"Where to?" he asked.

I turned to Vi. "Where'll we stay?"

She slipped her arm through mine and drew me aside. The porter went forward to engage the cabby.

"Give me one more night alone with Dorrie," she whispered. "Everything has been so—so hurried. You understand, dearest, don't you?"

I helped her into the four-wheeler and lifted Dorrie after her. Having told the man to drive to the *Cecil*, I was about to enter. She checked me. "We shall be able to get on all right." Then, in the darkness of the cab, her arms went passionately about my neck, and, all pretense abandoned, I felt her warm lips pressed against my mouth.

As the door banged Dorrie roused. Seeing me standing on the platform, she stretched her arms out of the window, crying, "Oh, I fought you was toming wiv' us, Dante."

"Not to-night, darling," said Vi.

"To-morrow," I promised her. Then to Vi, "I'll be round at the *Cecil* shortly after ten. Will that do?"

She nodded. I watched them drive away, after which I jumped into a hansom and set off to pay Pope Lane a surprise visit.

I could not sleep that night; I was making plans. The haste with which this step had been approached and taken had terrified Vi. I had been unwise. Her sensitiveness had been shocked by the raw way in which a desire takes shape in action. And the man by the harbor had upset her. I must get her away to a cottage in the country, where we could be alone, and where she would have time to grow accustomed to our altered relations.

Next morning, full of these arrangements, I sought her at the *Hotel Cecil*.

She was not there; the office had no record of her. I remembered that her boxes had been left at Liverpool Street overnight. When I got there and made inquiries of the clerk, I found that the lady I described had been to the baggage-room an hour before me and had claimed them. After much difficulty I hunted out the cabman who had driven her. He showed me alcoholic sympathy, at

once divining the irregularity of our relations, and told me that the lady had countermanded my orders and instructed him to drive her to the *Hotel Thackeray*. I arrived at the *Hotel Thackeray* in time to be informed that she had already left.

Four days later I received a letter which had been sent on from Ransby. It was from Vi, despatched with the pilot from the ship on which she was sailing to America.

She had not dared to see me again, she said. She was running away from the temptation to be selfish. She had reckoned up the price which her husband, Dorrie, and myself would have to pay that she might gain her happiness; she had no right to exact it. As far as her husband and Dorrie were concerned, if we had done what we had contemplated, we should have shattered something for them which we could never replace. She was going back to do her duty. That the task might not be made too difficult, she begged me not to write.

CHAPTER X

PUPPETS OF DESIRE

I RETURNED to Oxford. My rooms at Lazarus were in Fellows' Quad—one was a big room in which I lived and worked, the other was a small bedroom leading out of it. My windows overlooked the smooth lawns and gravel paths of the college garden. Flowers were over, hanging crumpled and brown on their withered stalks. Here and there, a solitary late-blooming rose shone faintly. The garden stood upon the city-wall, overlooking the meadows of the Broad Walk. Every evening white mists from the river invaded it, billowing across the open spaces, breaking against the shrubs, climbing higher and higher, till the tops of the trees were covered. Sitting beside my fire I could hear the leaves rustle, and turning my head could see them falling.

The ceiling of my living-room was low; the walls were paneled in white from bottom to top. The furniture was covered in warm red. The hearth was deep and the fender of polished steel, which reflected the glow of the coals when the day drew near its close. It was a room in which to sit quietly, to think, and to grow drowsy.

It was October when I returned. Meadows were turning from green to ash-color. Virginia-creeper flared like scarlet flame against pale walls. The contented melancholy of the austere city was healing. It cured feverishness by turning one's thoughts away from the present. In its stoic calm it was like an old man—one who had grown indifferent to the world's changefulness. In healthy contrast to its ancientness was the exuberant youth of the undergrads.

Most grief arises from a thwarted sense of one's own

importance. Here, among broken records of the past, the impermanence of physical existence was written plainly.

Defaced hopes of the ages encountered one at every corner. Of all the men who had wrought here, nothing but the best of what they had thought stood fast; their personalities, the fashion of their daily lives were lost beneath the dust of decades. No place could have been found better in which to doctor a wounded heart.

Through the winter that followed Vi's departure, the new conception I had of her nobility upheld me. I could not sink beneath her standard of honor. When the temptation to write to her came over me, I shamed myself into setting it aside.

I recognized now what would have been the inevitable penalty, had we followed our inclination that night. Only the madness of the moment could have blinded me to its result. We should have become persons cast off by society—insecure even in our claim on one another's affections, continually fleeing from the lean greyhound of remorse. Never for a day should we have been permitted to forget the irregularity of our relation. We should have been continually apologizing for our fault. We should have been continually hiding from curious, unfriendly eyes. The shame with which other people regarded us would have re-acted on our characters. And then there was Dorrie! She would have had to know one day.

We had the man by the harbor and "Lady Halloway" to thank for our escape. The strange combination of influences they had exerted at our hour of crisis, had saved us.

Black moments came when I gazed ahead into the vacant future. I must go through life without her. Unless some circumstance unforeseen should arise, we would never meet again. Then I felt that, to possess her, no price of disgrace would be too high to pay.

I trained myself like an athlete to defeat the despair which such thoughts occasioned. I tried to banish her from my mind. In my conscious moments I succeeded by

keeping myself occupied. But in sleep she came to me in all manner of intimate and forbidden ways.

I crowded my hours with work that I might keep true to my purpose. And yet this method of fighting, when analyzed, consisted chiefly in running away. I took up tutorial duties at my college. I commenced to make studies for a biography of that typical genius of the Renaissance, half libertine, half mystic, Æneas Sylvius Piccolomini, known to history in his old age as Pope Pius II. I tried to fill up my leisure with new friendships. In none of these things could I become truly interested. My thoughts were crossing the ocean. When I was deepest in study I would start, hearing her voice, sharp and poignant.

One afternoon I was sitting with my chair drawn up to the hearth, my feet on the fender, a board across my knees, trying to write. A tap fell on the door. Lord Halloway entered.

He took a seat on the other side of the fireplace. "I've been wanting to speak to you for some time," he said, "wanting to explain."

"Wanting to explain what?"

"Myself in general. You don't like me; I think you're mistaken. I'm not the man I was."

"But why should you explain to me?"

"Because I like you."

"Don't see why you should. Woadley's probably coming to me—which you once thought was to be yours."

"That doesn't worry me. I'll have the Lovegrove estates when my father dies. But I don't like to feel that any man despises me—it hampers a chap in trying to do right. You pass me in the quads with a nod, and hurry as you go by so that I shan't stop you. Why?"

"Want to know the truth?"

"Yes."

"It's because of the woman they call 'Lady Halloway' and all the other girls you've ruined."

"I thought it. That was why I wanted to tell you that I'm done with that way of life. I was a colossal ass in the

old days. But, you know, a good many fellows have been what I was, and they've married, and settled down and become respected."

"And what of the girls they've ruined?"

He leant forward, clasping his hands and spreading his knees apart. "You're blaming me for the injustices of society. Women have always had to suffer. But I've always done the sportsmanlike thing by the girls I've wronged. All of them are provided for."

"These things are your own affairs," I said shortly; "but I've always felt——"

"Felt what?"

"Felt that the most disreputable thing about most prodigals is the method of their returning. They leave all the women they've deceived and all their bastards in the Far Country with the swine and the husks, while they hobble home to forgiveness and luxury. Simply because they acknowledge the obvious—that they've sinned and disgraced their fathers—they expect to escape the rewards of their profligacy. It's cheap, Halloway. You speak as though marriage will re-instate your morals. A man should be able to bring a clean record to the woman he marries."

The off-hand manner in which he referred to his villainies had made me cold with a sense of justice. His lolling, fashionably attired person and his glib assertion that he had done with that way of life, roused my anger when I remembered his idiot son and the scene on the esplanade. He regarded me with a friendly man-of-the-world smile, pointing his delicate fingers one against the other. I would have liked him better had he shown resentment.

"You make things hard," he objected. "If everyone thought as you do, there'd be no incentive for reformation. The man who had been a little wild would never be anything else. According to your way of thinking, he'd be more estimable as a rake than as the father of a family. You shut the door against all coming back."

He spoke reasonably, trying to lift what had started as

a personal attack, on to the impartial plane of a sociological discussion.

"It's the unfairness of it that irks me," I said. "You tempt a girl and leave her to her disgrace. She bears both her own and your share of the scandal, while you scramble back into respectability. If you brought her back with you, I shouldn't object. But, after you've persuaded her to go down into the pit, you draw up the ladder and walk away."

He gave his high-pitched laugh. "That's how the world's made. It's none of my doing. If I married one of these girls, neither of us would be happy. One of these days I shall be Earl of Lovegrove. They're better as they are. You know that, surely?"

"I suppose so."

"Then, why prevent me, when I'm trying to get on to higher ground? I know I've been a rotter. I've made a mess of things. I don't need anyone to remind me."

I held out my hand, saying, "I've been censorious. I'm sorry."

After this he dropped in often to see me. He was coaching the Lazarus toggers that autumn; his usual time for calling was between four and five, on his way up from the river. I got to know him well and to look for him. His big robustness and high color filled the student atmosphere of my room with an air of outdoor vitality. He was always cheerful. And yet I could not get away from the idea that he was making use of me for some undisclosed purpose.

He was an egoist at heart—a charming egoist. Much of his conversation turned about himself. "Now that you know me better, do you still think that I'm barred from marriage?" he would ask.

"All kinds of people marry. It still seems unfair to me that, after knocking about the way you have, you should marry anyone who doesn't know the world pretty thoroughly."

"You mean I'm tarnished and should marry a woman

who is tarnished. You don't understand me, Cardover. My very knowledge of evil makes me worship feminine purity."

It was difficult to regard Lord Halloway as tarnished when you looked at his splendid body. His healthy physical handsomeness seemed an excuse for his transgressions. He upset all your ideas of the degrading influences of immorality.

After Christmas I had Ruthita down to stay at Oxford. We were walking along the tow-path towards Iffley on the afternoon of her arrival, when the Lazarus Eight went by. Halloway was mounted, riding along the bank, shouting orders to the cox. As he passed us, he recognized Ruthita. I saw her color flame up. She halted abruptly, following him with her eyes round the bend of the river.

"Shall we meet them again if we go on?"

I told her we should be certain to meet them, as they would turn at Iffley Lock.

"But I don't want to meet them." Then, in a whisper, "I'm afraid of him, Dante."

We retraced our steps to Folly Bridge and walked out to Hinksey to avoid him.

"You're an odd little creature, Ruthie. Why on earth should you be afraid of him? He can't do you any harm."

"It's his eyes. When he looks at me so hard, I forget all that I know about him, and begin to like him. And then, when he's gone, I come to myself and feel humiliated."

Now that I had found someone who would run him down, I changed sides and began to plead his cause. "Seems to me it's a bit rough on the chap to remember his old faults. He's quite changed."

"But the woman at Ransby hasn't," she retorted bitterly. "He didn't leave her a chance."

It was pleasant having Ruthita with me. I liked to hear the swish of her skirts as she walked, and to feel the light pressure of her hand upon my arm. She spoke with her face tilted up to mine. It was such a tiny face, so

emotional and innocent. The frost in the air had brought a color to her cheeks and a luster to her hair. She loved to make me feel that she was my possession for the moment; I knew that I pleased her when I used her as though she were all mine. We treated one another with frank affection.

"D'you ever hear from Vi?" she asked.

"Never."

"It was awfully strange the way she left Ransby—so suddenly, without saying good-by. I had just one little note from her before she sailed; that was all. I've written to her several times since then, but she's never answered."

I turned the subject by saying, "What's this about Uncle Obad? Is he giving up the boarding-house?"

"Yes, he's going down into Surrey to raise fowls. He's already got his farm. Aunt Lavinia's wild about it."

"But where does he get his money?"

"Nobody knows, and he refuses to tell. Papa says that he must have found another Rapson."

"But he isn't selling shares again, is he?"

"Oh dear no. He's become wonderfully independent, and says he doesn't need to make his poultry pay. It's just a hobby."

"Dear old chap! I hope he doesn't come another cropper."

"He says he can't, but he won't explain why. And d'you know, I believe he's given Papa back the two thousand pounds that he lost."

"I don't believe it. What makes you think that?"

"Because Papa's stopped talking against him, and because I caught him looking up those guide-books to Italy again."

We turned off from the Abingdon Road and curved round to the left through the sheep-farms of Hinksey. Hedges bristled bare on either side. Uplands rose bleak against the steely sky. Rutted lanes were brittle beneath our feet, crusted over here and there with ice. On thatched

roofs of cottages sparrows squatted with ruffled feathers. Icicles hung down from spouts. The lambing season was just commencing. As we drew near farms the warm smell of sheep packed close together assailed our nostrils. From far and wide a constant, distressful bleating went up. Quickly and silently, rising out of the ground, dropping down from the sky, darkness closed in about us. In the cup of the valley, with the river sweeping round it, lay Oxford with its glistening towers and church spires. Little pin-points of fire sprang up, shining hard and frosty through the winter's shadows. They raced through the city, as though a hundred lamp-lighters had wakened at once and were making up for lost time. Soon the somber mass was a blazing jewel, flinging up a golden blur into the night.

Ruthita hugged my arm. "Doesn't it make you glad to be alive? I'm never so happy as when I'm alone with you, Dante. It isn't what we say that does it. It's just being near one another."

She spoke like a child, groping after words, feeling far more than she could ever utter. But I knew what she meant. The woman in her was striving. Just as her flowerlike womanhood, unfolding itself to me secretly, made me hungry for Vi, so my masculinity stung her into wistful eagerness for a man's affection.

"You're a queer little kiddie. What you need's a husband. I shall be frightfully jealous of him. At first I shall almost hate him."

"If you hated him, I shouldn't marry him. Besides, I don't believe I shall ever marry."

We trudged back to Oxford in a gay mood, carrying on a bantering conversation. When we had entered Lazarus, I left her at the lodge, telling her to go to Fellows' Quad while I ordered tea at the pantry. As I approached my rooms, I heard the sound of voices. Opening the door, I saw the lamp had not been lit. By the flare of the fire, I made out the profile of Ruthita as she leant back in the arm-chair, resting her feet on the fender. Standing up,

looking down on her, with his arm against the mantel-shelf was Lord Halloway.

He glanced towards me in his careless fashion. "This is quite the pleasantest thing that could have happened. I've often thought about the drive to Woadley and wondered whether we three should ever meet all together again." Then, turning to Ruthita, "Your brother's so secretive, Miss Cardover. He never breathed a word about your coming."

"My sister's name is not Cardover," I corrected him.

He drew himself to his full height languidly. "I must apologize for having misnamed you, Miss—Miss——"

"My name is Favart," put in Ruthita.

"Isn't it strange," he asked, "that a brother and sister should be named differently?"

Then I had another illustration of how he could draw out women's confidence. Ruthita had just run three miles in the opposite direction to avoid him, yet here she was eagerly telling him many things that were most intimate—all about her father and the Siege of Paris, and how I climbed the wall and discovered her, and how we had run off to get married and stayed with the gipsies in the forest.

The tea-boy came and set crumpets and muffins down by the hearth. I lit the lamp. Still they went on talking, referring to me occasionally, but paying little heed to my presence.

The bell began to toll for Hall.

Halloway rose. "How long are you going to be in Oxford, Miss Favart?"

"That depends on Dante, and how long he will have me."

"Then you're staying a little while?"

"Yes."

"I ask, because I'd like to take Cardover and yourself out driving. I have my horses in Oxford and you ought to see some of the country."

"That depends on Dante."

"We'll talk it over to-morrow," I said brusquely.

For the next few days, wherever we went we were unaccountably coming across Halloway. He always expressed surprise at meeting us, and always made himself delightful after we had met. If we walked out to Cumnor, or Sandford or Godstow, it made no difference in which direction, we were sure to hear the sharp trit-trotting of his tandem, and to see his high red dog-cart gaining on us above the hedges. Then he would rein up, with a display of amazed pleasure at these repeated accidents, and insist on our mounting beside him. Ruthita told me that she was annoyed at the way he broke up our privacy; but her annoyance was saved entirely for his absence. In his company she allowed him to absorb her.

I had accompanied Ruthita back to the *Mitre*, where she was staying. It was her last night. On returning to my rooms, I found Halloway waiting. I was surprised, for the hour was late. I noticed that his manner was unusually serious and pre-occupied for such an habitual trifler. When I had mixed him a whiskey and soda, I sat down and watched him. He tapped his teeth with his thumb-nail.

I grew restless. "What is it?" I asked. "Something on your mind?"

"Don't know how to express it. You've made it difficult for me."

"How?"

"By the things you've said from time to time. You see, it's this way. Until I met Miss Favart I was quite unashamed of myself. Her purity and goodness made me view myself in a new light. Since then I've tried to retrieve my past to some extent. Of course, I can never be worthy of her, but——"

"Worthy of her! I don't understand." I leant forward in my chair, frowning.

"You do understand," he said quietly. "You must have guessed it from the first. I'm in love with her and intend to make her my wife."

"Intend!" I repeated.

He rose to his feet, as though willing to show me his fine body, and began to pace the room with the stealthy tread of a panther. He kept his eyes on mine. When he spoke there was a purring determination in his voice.

"Yes, intend. I've always had my way with women. You'll see; I shan't fail this time. I may have to wait, perhaps."

"Halloway," I said, "I don't suppose you're capable of realizing how decent people feel about you. Of course there are many men who disguise their feelings when they see you trying to do better. But very few of those same men would introduce you to their sisters, or daughters, or wives. To put it plainly, they'd feel they were insulting them. So now you know how I feel about what you've just told me."

He paused above me, looking down with an amused smile.

"My dear Cardover, that's just what I expected from you. You virgin men are so brutally honest where your ideals are concerned—so hopelessly evasive in facing up to realities. Don't you know that life *is* a coarse affair? I've lived it naturally—most strong men have at some time. I've been open in what I've done. Everybody knows the worst there is to know about me. Most men do these things in secret. I couldn't be secret and preserve my self-respect. Skeletons in the cupboard ar'n't much in my line. Ruthita knows me at my wickedest now; when she knows me at my best, she'll love me."

"When my sister marries," I said coldly, "it'll be to a man who can bring her something better than the dregs of his debaucheries."

He gave his foolish laugh. "That's a new name for the Lovegrove titles. I'd better be going. If I stay longer, you may make me angry."

I rose to see him take his departure. He had passed out and gone a few steps down the passage, when I heard him returning. The door just opened wide enough for him to look in on me. "My dear Cardover," he said, "I

came back to remind you of another of those evasive realities. You know, she isn't your sister."

A week later I received an indignant letter from Ruthita, saying that Lord Halloway had been to Pope Lane to see my father, and had asked for her hand in marriage. She had refused even to see him. By the same mail came a letter from the Snow Lady, couched in milder terms and asking for information. She wanted to know whether Halloway was as black as he was painted. I referred her to Ruthita, telling her to ask her to describe what happened on the esplanade. As a result I received a final letter, agreeing with me that the matter was impossible, but at the same time enlarging on the wealth and prestige of the Lovegrove earldom.

For a fortnight I refused to have anything to do with my cousin, but his imperturbable good-humor made rancor impossible. In the cabined intimacies of college life a quarrel was awkward. To the aristocratic much is forgiven; moreover he was a splendid all-round athlete and one of the hardest riders to hounds that the 'Varsity had ever had. So he was popular with dons and undergraduates alike. One morning when he stopped me in Merton Street, offering me his hand, I took it, agreeing to renew his acquaintance. My commonsense told me that the defeated party had most cause for grievance. His sporting lack of bitterness sent him up in my estimation.

Spring broke late on the world that year in a foam of flowers. Like a swollen tide it swept through our valley in wanton riot and stormed across the walls of our gray old town. It surged into shadowy cloisters and dashed up in spray of may-blossom and lilac. Every tree was crested with the flying foam of its hurry. The Broad Walk, leading down to the barges, was white with blown bloom of chestnuts.

Quadrangles became gay with geraniums. Through open windows music and men's laughter sounded. Flannelled figures, carrying rackets and cricket-bats, shot hither and thither on bicycles. At evening, in the streets beneath

college windows, groups of strolling minstrels strummed on banjos and sang. Fresh-faced girls, sweethearts and sisters of the undergraduates, drifted up and down our monastic by-ways, smiling eagerly into their escort's eyes, leaving behind them ripples of excitement.

All live things were mating. The instinct for love was in the air. My longing for Vi was quickened. The sight of girls' faces filled me with poignancy. Every beauty of sound, or sight, or fragrance became commemorative of her. By day I traced her resemblance in the features of strangers. Inflamed desire wove tapestries of passion on the canvas of the night. Roaming through lanes of the countryside, I would meet young lovers in secluded places, and flee from them in a tempest of envy. Had she sent me one little sign that she still cared, I would have abandoned everything and have gone to claim her. My mind was burning. I poured out my heart to her in letters which, instead of sending, I destroyed. I became afraid.

Halloway was in the same plight. He never mentioned Ruthita; but he would come to my room, and pause before her photograph and fall silent. However, he knew how to shuffle his fortune to convenience his environment. He had his comforters. Gorgeous young females fluttered in and out of his apartments, like painted butterflies. His only discretion was in the numbers of his choice. They might have been the daughters of dukes by their appearance, but you knew they were chorus-girls from London. One day when I questioned him, he threw me a cynical smile, saying, "I'm trying the expulsive power of a new affection."

The phrase took root. If I was to do the honorable thing by Vi, I also must employ my heart in a new direction. The thing was easy to say, but it seemed impossible that I should ever be attracted by another woman.

It had become my habit to spend much of my time sitting by the open window of my room, gazing out into the college garden. Hyacinths, tulips, crocuses bubbled up from beneath the turf. Every day brought a change. In

the spring breeze the garden tossed and nodded, applauding its own endeavor. Songsters had returned to their last year's nests. From morn to dusk they caroled in the shrubberies. Twittering their love-songs or trailing straws, they flashed across gulfs which separated the chestnuts. Over Bagley Wood, as I sat at work, I could hear the cuckoo calling. From the unseen river came the shouting of coaches to their crews, and the long and regular roll of oars as they turned in their rowlocks.

I glanced up from my books one evening. The glow of sunset hovered along the city-wall. Leaning over its edge, looking down into the meadows, a tall girl was standing. Her back was towards me. She was dressed in the palest green. Her hair was auburn. She held her skirt daringly high, disclosing the daintiest of ankles. Her open-work stockings were also of green to match the rest of her attire. Her companion was Brookins, the assistant chaplain, an effeminate little man, who was known among the undergraduates as the doe-priest. He seemed ill at ease; she was manifestly flirting with him. In the stillness of the garden the penetrating cadence of her gay voice reached me. It was friendly, and had the lazy caressing quality of a summer's afternoon when bees are humming in and out of flowers. I was tantalized by a haunting memory. She turned her face part way towards me. I caught her mocking profile. The way the red-gold curls fell across her forehead was familiar; and yet I could not remember. She came along the terrace, walking in long, slow, undulating strides. The west shone full upon her. She was brilliant and gracious, and carried herself with an air of challenging pride. Her tall, slim figure broke into exquisite lines as she walked, revealing its shapely frailty. Her narrow face, with its arch expression of innocence, promised a personality full of secrets and disguises.

I stepped across the sill of my window into the garden. They were near enough now for me to catch an occasional word of their conversation. I approached across the lawn towards them. She glanced in my direction casually; then

she steadied her gaze. I saw that her eyes were green, specked with gold about the iris. She stooped her head, still gazing at me, and asked a question of the doe-priest in a lowered voice. I heard him speak my name. A bubbling laugh sprang from her lips. She came tripping towards me with her hand extended.

"You're not going to pretend you don't know me?"

"I do know you, and yet I can't recall where we have met or what is your name."

"Were you ever in Sneard's garden at the Red House?"

"You're——"

"Fiesole Cortona, and you're Dante."

We stood there holding one another's hands, searching one another's faces and laughing gladly.

"Well I never!" I kept repeating. "Fancy meeting you after all these years!"

"Am I much changed?" she questioned.

"You're more beautiful," I said boldly.

She nodded her head roguishly. "I can see you're no longer afraid of girls. You were once, you remember."

The doe-priest had stood by watching us nervously. It was plain that Fiesole had scared him—he was glad to be relieved of her. The bell in the tower began to toll for dinner. Brookins jangled his keys, edging towards the gate.

"Poor Mr. Brookins, are you hungry? Must you be going?"

"I don't like to be late at high table, Miss Cortona," he replied stiffly. "The Warden is very particular about punctuality."

"Never mind, Brookins," I said, "I'll look after Miss Cortona. You cut along."

Brookins made his farewells with more alacrity than politeness. Fiesole gazed after his departing figure with mischievous merriment in her eyes.

"He thinks me a dangerous person," she pouted. "He thinks I was luring him on to be naughty. He'll go and preach a sermon about me. He's bristling with righteous-

ness. And now that he's managed to escape, he's locking poor innocent you, Dante, all alone in the garden with the wicked temptress."

"I rather like it. Besides, I know a way out—over there, through my window."

As we strolled across the lawn I asked her, "Where, under the sun, did you pick up Brookins? He doesn't seem just your sort."

"I picked him up at Aix-les-Bains. He was sowing his wild oats imaginatively and eyeing the ladies in *La Villa des Fleurs*. He was trying to find out what it felt like to be truly devilish."

"That doesn't sound like Brookins. I suppose he was gathering experience, so that he might be able to deal understandingly with erring undergrads."

"You're charitable. At any rate, when I met him he was playing the truant from morality. I was in the Casino."

"What doing? Gambling?"

She nodded. "You see I was nearly as bad as Mr. Brookins. He came and stood behind my chair while I was playing. When I got up and went out into the garden, he followed. It was all dusky and dimly lit with faery-lamps. I suppose it made him feel romantic. I saw what he was doing out of the corner of my eye; so, for the fun of it, I tried to fascinate him."

"I'll warrant you did. It was the old game you played with me and the Bantam. You take delight in making other people uncomfortable. It's the most adventurous thing about you, Fiesole. You've got the name of a lullaby and the manners of a mustard-plaster. You'll be trying to sting me presently, when you catch me sleepy and unaware."

"Not you, Dante."

She spoke my name coaxingly, veiling her eyes with her long lashes.

"But you did once."

"Did I? So you still remember?"

I was unwilling to be sentimental. "What did you do next to poor Brookins?"

She took up the thread of her story with feigned demureness. "I chose out a bench well hidden in the shadows. He came and seated himself on the edge of it, as far away as he could get from me. He cleared his throat several times. I could hear him moistening his lips. Then he whispered, almost turning his back on me, 'Je vous aime.' And I whispered, turning my back on him, 'Do you? Now isn't that lovely!'"

"And then?"

"Oh, then, finding I was English, he became more comfy. He began to boast about Oxford and mentioned Lazarus. So I thought to-day the least I could do was to call on him. I didn't know he was a parson. You should have seen his face when he saw me. I've been getting even with him all this afternoon. He thinks I've risen out of the buried past to haunt him."

She broke into low musical laughter, shaking her shoulders.

"You were cruel, Fiesole. What he said to you was the sum total of the intent of his wickedness. He had reached the limit of his daring."

"I know it. That's why I don't like him. He isn't thorough. He told me that his name was Jordan at Aix. When I asked for him at the lodge to-day, the porter said there weren't no sich purson. I was turning away, when I saw him coming across quad in full clericals, walking by the side of a stooping old gentleman shaped like the letter C."

"That would be the Warden."

"Oh, was it? Well, he didn't see me and was walking right by me. I tapped him on the arm and said, 'Good-afternoon, Mr. Jordan.' He paled to his lips and stared. The old gentleman raised his hat to me and said, 'This is Mr. Brookins, not Mr. Jordan, my dear young lady. You must be mistaken.' 'Jordan's my pet name for him,' I answered. The old gentleman smiled, and smiled again

and left us. Then I turned to Mr. Brookins and said, 'Je vous aime. Be sure your sins will find you out.' After that I tried to be very nice to him, but somehow I couldn't make him happy."

"I'm not surprised. Brookins was wondering how he could explain to the Warden not knowing a charming young lady, who had a pet name for him. They're asking him about it now at the high-table, and he's lying fit to shame the devil. His pillow will be drenched to-night with tears of penitence. You rehearsed the Judgment Day to him. You've turned the tables on him, because, you know, that's his profession every Sunday."

I helped her to step across the sill of my window. She gazed round my room, taking in the pipes and tobacco-ash and clothes strewn about. "I love it," she said. "It's so cosy and mannish."

She perched herself on the arm of a chair, so that the golden after-glow fell athwart her. I watched her, thinking how little she had changed from the old Fiesole. She was still tantalizing, as mischievous as a school-girl; once she had fiddled with boys' heartstrings, now she took her pastime in breaking men's.

She was a creature of vivid mysteries, alternately wooing and repelling. She could beckon you on with passionate white arms and thrust you from her with hands of ice. She came out of nowhere like a wild thing from a wood. You looked up and saw her—she vanished. She courted rapture and invited pursuit; but you knew that, though you caught her, you would never tame her.

She had plucked a deep-cupped daffodil from a vase on the table. She was bending over it with a tender air of contemplation. She held the long slim stalk low down in her dainty, long, slim fingers. The golden dust of the petals seemed the reflection of the golden glint that was in her hair. The stalk was the color of her eyes. Her tempestuous loveliness—made to lure and torture men, to fill them with cravings which she could not satisfy—was resting now.

She looked up at me with calculated suddenness. She read admiration in my eyes.

"You find me pretty nice, don't you, Dante?"

"I'm not disguising it, am I?"

"I thought, maybe, you were cross with me about Brookins. We never quite approved of one another, did we, Dante? You thought and still think me a coquette."

"Well, aren't you?"

"With some people, but not with you. I only played with the Bantam to draw you out of your shell."

"Really?"

"Really."

Then the absurdity of being serious over an affair of childhood struck us and we went off into gales of laughter.

"Let's be sensible," I said. "What are you doing? Staying at Oxford with friends?"

"No. I'm traveling alone with my maid."

"Have you any engagement for this evening?"

"No."

"Then why shouldn't we spend it together?"

"No reason in the world."

"Where'll we spend it?"

"Here, if you like."

"But we can't spend it here, just you and I. The college doesn't allow it. Besides, you haven't had dinner. Where'll we dine?"

"Anywhere."

"What do you say to punting down to Sandford and dinner at the inn there?"

"I'm game."

As we passed through the quads, men were coming out of Hall from dinner. Some of them went thundering up wooden-stairs to their rooms, tearing off their gowns. Others strolled arm-in-arm joking and conversing, smoking cigarettes. At sight of Fiesole, they hauled up sharply. She was a man's woman, and they were struck by her beauty. With one accord they turned unobtrusively and hurried their steps towards the lodge, to catch one more

glimpse of her face as she passed out. She betrayed no sign that she was aware of the sensation she was creating. She advanced beside me with eyes modestly lowered, enhancing her allurements with a serene air of innocence. Out in the street her manner changed.

"The men do that always," she said, "and, do you know, I rather like them for it."

"What do they do?"

"Stare after me."

"Don't wonder Brookins was shocked by you, Fiesole. You're a very shocking person. You say the most alarming things."

She laid her hand on my arm for a second. "But I say them charmingly. Don't I?"

On our way through the meadows to the barges, I asked her what she had been doing all these years.

"For a time I tried the stage, but lately I've been traveling in Europe. I have no relations—nothing to keep me tethered. I roam from place to place with my maid, moving on and on again."

"Not married?"

"I'm not the kind of woman who marries. Men like me, but when it comes to making me their wife, it's 'Oh no, thank you.' They want a woman a little more stupid. Are you married?"

"Hardly."

She shot me a penetrating glance. "Engaged?"

"Not that I'm aware of."

We came to the Lazarus barge. I piled cushions in a punt for her. She lay with her back to the prow, so that she faced me. I took the pole and pushed off into mid-stream.

We had the river to ourselves; its restful loneliness caused us to fall silent. We left the barges quickly; then we drifted slowly. Fields were growing white and vaporous. The air was damp, and cool, and earthy. Behind us the spires of Oxford shone like a clump of spears against the embattled, orange-tinted sky. Before us, swimming in

blue haze, was Ifley Mill. Everything was becoming ill-defined—receding into nothingness. Far away across meadows to the right we caught sounds of gritting hoofs and the grinding of a wagon. Sometimes a bird uttered one long fluty cry. Sometimes a swallow swooped near us.

"Dante, all the others have passed on, and there's only you and I. What's happened to the Bantam?"

"Married in Canada. He's farming."

"I believe you thought you loved me in the old days."

"I could tell you some things to prove it."

"You didn't do much to prove it at the time. You were a terribly shy and stubborn boy. You left me to do all the courting. I've often laughed at the things I did to try and make you kiss me."

"And that was what I was wanting most to do all the time. D'you know what sent me to the infirmary?"

Then I told her how I had crept out of bed and out of doors in the middle of the night to visit the summer-house.

"What a little beast I was," she said. "I'm always being a little beast, Dante. That's the way I'm made. Can't help it. But I'll never be like that to you again."

By the time we got to Sandford it was night. Lamps in the inn were lighted, shining through the trees across the river. We had dinner in the room next to the bar, in an atmosphere of beer and sawdust and tobacco. The windows were open; the singing of water across the weir was accompaniment to our conversation.

She told me the beginning of many things about herself with a strange mixture of frankness and restraint. She spoke of the early days in Italy before her parents died, and of the ordered quiet of her convent life at Tours. After her expulsion from the Red House she had returned to France, and fallen in with the artistic set that had been her father's in Paris. Her guardian, an old actor, had persuaded her to train for the stage. For a time she had succeeded, but had dropped her profession to go traveling.

"I'm an amateur at living," she told me; "I'm always chopping and changing. I'll find what I want some day."

Her restlessness had carried her into many strange places. Northern Africa was known to her; she had been through India and Persia. Speaking in her lazy voice, with the faintest trace of a foreign accent, she painted pictures of sun-baked deserts with caravans of nodding camels; of decayed, oriental cities sprawled out like bleached bones in palm-groves beside some ancient river-bank; of strange fierce rituals in musty temples, demanding the blood-sacrifice. She made me feel while she spoke how narrowly I had lived my life. Like a fly on a window-pane I had crawled back and forth, back and forth, viewing the adventure of the great outside, rebellious at restraint, but never taking any rational measures for escape.

The river droned across the weir. In the bar-room next door glasses clinked; yokels' voices rose and fell hoarsely in argument. Fiesole came to a halt and leant back in her chair, gazing searchingly into my face across the table.

"You look queer, Dante. What's the matter?"

I laughed shortly. "You've been putting the telescope to my eye. You've been making me see things largely. How was it that you broke loose that way?"

"I had a horror of growing stodgy. I was born to be a South Sea Islander and to run about naked in the sunshine."

"How long are you to be in Oxford?"

"Don't know. I've made no plans. I hadn't expected to spend more than one night. But now——"

She did not finish the sentence. We rose from the table. In the porch we loitered, breathing in the deep, cool stillness.

"You'll stay a little while, won't you, Fiesole?"

She took my arm and smiled. "Of course—if you want me."

Going down through the arbors, we stepped into the punt. The river was a-silver with moonlight.

CHAPTER XI

SPRING WEATHER

I DRUGGED myself with Fiesole to avoid thinking of Vi. Fiesole was so vivid in her personality that, while she was present, she absorbed my whole attention and shut out memory.

She was a continual source of pleasure and surprise, for her mood was forever changing. She could be as naughty as a French novel and as solemn as the Church of England Prayer Book. When she tried to be both together she was at her drollest; it was like Handel played on a mouth-organ.

She would never let me take her seriously. There lay the safety of our comradeship. At the first hint of sentiment, she flew like a hare before a greyhound; the way she showed her alarm was by converting what should have been pathos into absurdity.

Day after day of memorable beauty I spent with her in that blowy Cotswold country. We would usually appoint our place of meeting somewhere on the outskirts of Oxford. It was not necessary to let everyone know just how much of our time was lived together. This care for public opinion lent our actions the zest of indiscretion.

As I set out to meet her, I would pass crowds of undergrads, capped and gowned, sauntering off to their morning lectures. I was playing truant, and that gave an added spice to adventure. Each college doorway frowned on my frivolity, calling me back to a sense of duty. But the young foliage glittered and the spring wind romped down the street, and the shadows quivered and jumped aside as the sunlight splashed them. The lure of the feminine

beckoned. Where the houses grew wider apart I would find her, and we would commence our climb out of the valley. Now we would come to a farm-house, standing gray and mediæval in a sea of tossing green. Now we would pass by flowery orchards, smoking with scattered bloom. Brooks tinkled; birds sang; across the hedge a plowman called to his horses and started them up a new furrow. And through all this commotion of new-found life and clamorous hearts we two wandered, glad in one another.

Only the atmosphere of what we talked about remains with me. There were moments when we skirted the sea-shore of affection, and perhaps pushed out from land a little way, speculating on love's audacities and dangers. But these moments were rare, for Fiesole delighted in love's pursuit and not in its certainty. We made no pretense that our attraction for one another was more than friendly and temporary. If we played occasionally at being lovers, it was understood that we were only playing.

Fiesole never admitted that she had prolonged her stay in Oxford for my sake. She kept me in constant attendance by the threat that this might be my last chance of being with her. The supposition that her visit was shortly to end gave us the excuse we needed for being always together. We lived the hours which we shared intensely, as friends do who must soon go their separate ways.

But beneath her veneer of wit and frivolity I began to discover a truer and kinder Fiesole. These flashes of self-revelation came when she was off her guard. They were betrayed by a tremor in her tone or a hesitancy in her gaiety. After a day of exquisite sensations, her independence would break down and the fear of loneliness would look out from her eyes. She would prolong her departure, again postponing it beyond the date appointed. I began to suspect that her dashing recklessness was a barrier of habit, which she had erected to defend her shyness from curious observers. Insincerity was a cloak for her sincerity. Hidden behind her tantalizing lightness lay

the deep and urgent feminine desire for a man and little children. I had roused in her the mating instinct. I was not the man; she had yet to find him. With myself the same thing was true. I took delight in her partly for herself, but mainly as Vi's proxy. Fiesole and I had come together in a moment of crisis. We saw in each other the shadow of what we desired.

When a month had gone by I began to debate with myself how far our conduct was safe and justifiable. I went so far as to ask myself the question, did I want to marry her. But that consideration was impossible in my state of mind. Besides, as Fiesole herself had said, she was the type of woman that a man may love and yet fear to marry. She had no sense of moral responsibility. She would demand too much of herself and her lover. Her passion, once aroused, would burn too ardently. It would be self-consuming. She was a wild thing of the wood, swift and beautiful, and un-moral.

May had slipped by. June was nearly ended. Still she delayed. A chance remark of Brookins brought me to my senses and forced me to face the impression we had created. Fiesole, when she visited me in college, invariably brought her maid; we would shut her up in my bedroom while we sat in my study. In this way, we supposed, appearances had been saved. But Brookins's remark proved the contrary—that he hoped I'd let him know when I moved out of Lazarus as he'd like to have my rooms.

"I'm not moving out of Lazarus. What made you think that?"

"You'll have to when you're married."

"But what makes you think that I'm going to be married?"

"We don't have to think," he tittered. "We only have to use our eyes."

That decided me. In common fairness we must separate. Since I could not make the suggestion to her, I determined to leave Oxford myself. The term was nearly ended. My work on the Renaissance furnished an excuse

for a visit to Italy. I had never been out of England as yet; at Pope Lane we had had all we could do to keep up a plausible appearance of stay-at-home respectability. But Fiesole with her talk of travel, had led me to peep out of the back-door of the world. I made up my mind to start immediately.

It was a golden summer's evening. How well I remember it! I had not seen her for two days. I was finishing my packing. A trunk stood in the middle of the floor partly filled. Over the backs of chairs clothes hung disorderly. Piles of books lay muddled about the carpet, among socks and shirts and underwear. Through the open window from the garden drifted in the rumor of voices and the perfume of roses.

The door opened without warning. I was kneeling beside the trunk. Glancing over my shoulder I saw her. She slipped into the room like a ray of sunlight, and stood behind me. She wore a golden dress, gathered in at the waist with a girdle of silver. Her arms, bare from the elbow, hung looped before her with the fingers knotted.

I glanced at her a moment. Her face was pale with reproach. Her rebelliousness had departed. Her lips trembled. She looked like a sensitive child, trying not to cry when her feelings had been wounded. This was the true Fiesole I had long suspected, but had never before discovered. We had no use for polite explanations; in the past two months we had lived too near together. She knew what it all meant—the half-filled trunk, the scattered clothing, the piles of books. Feeling ashamed, with a hurried greeting I turned back to my packing.

"You're going."

She spoke in a low voice, with a tremble in it. It filled me with panic desire to be kind to her; yet I dared not trust myself. I did not love her. I kept telling myself that I did not love her. My whole mind and being were pledged to another woman. And yet pity is so near to love that I could not allow myself to touch her. I was mad from the restraint I had suffered. To touch her

might result in irreparable folly. Kneeling lower over my trunk, I shifted articles hither and thither, pressed them closer, moved them back to their original places, doing nothing useful, simply trying to keep my hands busy.

She watched me. I could not see her, but I felt that behind my back the slow, sweet, lazy smile was curling up the corners of her mouth. I knew just how she was looking—how the eyebrows were twitching and nostrils panting, the long white throat was working. I fixed my mind upon Vi. I was doing this for her. Maybe, if Fiesole had come first, we might have married. But we should not have been happy. I must be true to Vi, I told myself. I was like a man parched with thirst in a burning desert, who sees arise a mirage of green waters and blue palm-trees—and knows it to be a mirage, and yet is tempted.

"You were going away without telling me."

Her voice broke. I listened for the sob, but it did not follow. Outside in the garden a thrush awoke; his notes fell like flashing silver, gleaming dimmer and dimmer as they sank into the silence.

"You were going away because of me. I would have gone if you had spoken."

Still kneeling, I looked up at her. "Fiesole, I didn't dare to tell you. Something was said. We had to separate. I thought this way was best."

"Said about me?"

"About us."

"What was it?"

"I don't like to tell you."

"I can guess. They said you were in love with me. Was that it?"

I tried to rise, but she held me down with her hands upon my shoulders. Each time I bent back my head to answer, she stooped lower above me. Her breath was in my hair. The gold flashed up in the depths of her eyes. Her voice broke into slow laughter. With her lips touching my forehead she whispered, "And what if they did say it?"

For a moment we gazed at one another. I hoped and I dreaded. By one slight action of assent, the quiver of an eye-lid or the raising of a hand, I would thrust Vi from me forever. A marriage with Fiesole would at least be correct—approved by society; but I should have to sin against Vi to get it—to sin against a love which was half-sinful.

Fiesole straightened. The tension relaxed. She placed her hand on my head, ruffling my hair. As though imitating the thrush, a peal of silver laughter fell from her lips. "Oh, Dante, Dante! You are just as you were. You're still afraid of girls."

I rose to my feet. She was again a coquette, rash, luring attack, but always on the defensive. I gained control of myself as my pity ebbed. I had been mistaken in thinking I had hurt her. I should have known she was play-acting. And yet I doubted.

We walked over to the lounge by the window. I seated myself beside her, confident now of my power to restrain myself. "I was afraid for you—not of you."

"Why should you be afraid for me when I'm not afraid for myself? No, Dante, it wasn't that. You're afraid of yourself. Someone told you long, long ago, when you were quite little, that it was naughty to flirt. You've never forgotten it, and each time you begin to feel a bit happy you believe you're going to do something bad. So you've put your heart to bed, and you've locked the door, and you've drawn the curtains. You play nurse to it, and every time it stirs, you tiptoe to the door to see that the key is turned, and to the windows to see that they're properly bolted. I'll tell you what's the matter with you, Dante. I stole along the passage and hammered on the door of your heart's bedroom, and your heart half-roused and called, 'Nurse.' There!"

She threw herself back against the cushions, seizing both my hands in hers. She gazed at me unflinchingly, daringly, mockingly. She drew me to her and thrust me from her with quick sharp jerks. She treated the situation so light-

heartedly, so theatrically, that I could have kissed her with impunity. But it would have been like kissing the statue of a woman. She would have remained unmoved, unresponsive. There would have been no adventure of conquest.

"No, Miss Impudence," I said, "you're wrong. I wish sometimes my heart were safe in bed. You and I have been good friends. You came to me at a time when I most needed you. You never guessed the good you were doing. If this hadn't happened, I would never have told you. But when I heard something said about you, which no girl would like to have said unless it were true, I thought it was time I should be going. You've been so good to me that I couldn't return your good with evil."

"But, my dear, I daresay I've flirted with half-a-hundred men. It's very nice of you to think I haven't, and to be so careful of me. But really it doesn't matter what anybody says. I don't want you to run away because of that, just when we were having such a good time together."

"You won't let me be serious," I protested. "Now I want you to imagine for a minute that I'm old, and inoffensive, and have white hair."

"Oh, yes, and about seventy."

"About seventy-five I should say—I've known some pretty lively men of seventy."

"All right. About seventy-five. I'm imagining."

"My dear girl, you're twenty-four or thereabouts, and you're extremely beautiful. No man can look at you without being fascinated. I've often wanted to kiss you myself."

"Then why didn't you do it?"

"Fiesole, you're not playing the game," I said sternly. "Please go on imagining."

"I'm imagining."

"As I was saying, you're extremely fascinating. Everything's in your favor for making a happy and successful marriage, except one thing."

"What's that?"

"You have no parents. Now parents are a kind of passport. Seeing that you haven't any, you've got to be more circumspect than other girls. It has come to my ears that for the past two months you've been seen every day with one young gentleman. People are beginning to talk about it. Since you don't intend to marry him, you ought to drop him until you are married."

"Who says I don't intend to marry him?"

She took me by the shoulders and drew me to her. The afterglow had faded from the garden. I could not see her face distinctly, but it seemed to me that that old expression of hungry wistfulness was coming back. I heard men enter the room overhead. A bar of light, like a golden streamer, fluttered and fell across the lawn. A piano struck up, playing *Mr. Dooley*. The dusk was humanized and robbed of its austerity. Her hands trembled on my shoulders. For a second time I doubted the genuineness of her play-acting. I hurried on.

"But if you did want to marry him it would make no difference. He's pledged to another woman."

Her hands fell away. When she spoke it was gravely and with effort. "You didn't tell me. You said you weren't engaged when I asked you."

"Neither am I, nor likely to be."

"Why not?"

"She's married."

The silence was broken by her taking my hand. She took it with a sudden gesture and, bowing her head, kissed it. "Poor Dante," she whispered.

I rose from the sofa and lit the lamp. Kneeling by my trunk, I blunderingly recommenced my packing. From the window came a muffled, choking sound. Perhaps she was trying not to sob. I had never seen her so gentle as just now. My mind ran back over the long road we had traveled. The Fiesole I had seen was a wild, mad girl, provoking, charming, inconsiderate as a child and frolicsome as the mad spring weather—but rarely tender. I wondered what other secrets of kindness lay hidden in her

personality. She was the sort of woman a man might live with for twenty years and still be discovering. She kept one restless by the very richness of her character. It was true what she had said: many men might love her; few would desire to marry her.

She rose from the lounge. Standing between me and the lamp, her long shadow fell across me. I looked up and saw that her lashes glistened. Against the background of the white-paneled room she looked supremely lovely—a tall, gold daffodil. She held her head high on her splendid shoulders with a gesture of proud despair. And yet an appearance of meekness clothed her. Her face had an expression which a young girl's often has, but which hers had seldom—an expression which was maternal. She watched my clumsy attempts to squeeze my clothes into smaller compass. Then she came and knelt beside me, saying, "Let me do it."

Her swift white hands plied back and forth, re-arranging, smoothing out with deft touches, reaching out for socks to fill the hollows, rectifying my awkwardness. The thought flashed on me that this sensation I had was one of the sacred things of marriage—a man's dependence on a woman. As I watched, I imagined the future, if this woman should become a wife to me. But the passion for her was not in me. She was only an emotion. The sight of her made me hungrier, but not for her. I reasoned with myself, saying how many men would desire her. I forced myself to notice the curve of her neck, the way the red-gold curls clustered about her shell-like ears and broad white forehead. I told myself that the best solution for Vi would be that I leave her unembarrassed by marrying Fiesole. But the more I urged matters, the colder grew my emotions. Then my emotions ceased and my observations became entirely mental.

Overhead, strident and uproarious, as if striving to burlesque what should have been chivalrous, the piano thumped and banged; men's voices smote the night like hammer-strokes on steel, singing,

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"Mr. Dooley! Oh, Mr. Dooley!
Mr. Dooley——ooley——ooley——oo."

"It's done," she said. Then, "Where are you going?"

"To Italy."

"My country. When?"

"To-morrow."

"You'll write me sometimes? I shall be lonely, you know, at first."

"Why, certainly."

"Then, if you're going to write to me, I must write to you. You'll have to let me have your addresses so that I can send my letters on ahead."

I wrote her out the list of towns and dates, telling her to address me *poste restante*.

I accompanied her across the quad to the lodge. I had had no idea it was so late. Big Tom had ceased ringing for an hour. It was past ten. The porter, when I called him out to unlock the gate, eyed us disapprovingly.

"I'll see you home," I told her.

She hesitated, urged that she could get home quite safely by herself, it was such a short way to go—but at last she surrendered.

Through the mysterious, moon-washed streets we walked; but not near together as formerly. We had nothing to say to one another. Or was it that we had too much, and they were things that we were ashamed to utter? The echo of our footfall followed behind us like a presence. At the turnings we lost it. Then it seemed to hurry till it had made up the distance; again it followed. The cobble-stones beneath us made our steps uneven. Sometimes we just brushed shoulders, and started apart with a guilty sense of contact. Sometimes we passed a window that was lighted by a student's lamp. We could see him through the curtains poring over outspread books, holding his head between his hands. As we turned to look in on him, our faces were illumined. Her face was troubled; coming out of the night suddenly it looked blanched and distressful.

The air became heavy with the perfume of laburnums. It occurred to me that the laburnum was the flower with which she was best compared. It burned, and blazed, and fell unwithered. In crossing Magdalene Bridge we caught the sighing of willows along the banks of the Cherwell. I had often thought how restful was the sound. To-night I marvelled at myself; it seemed poignant with anguish, like a fretful heart stirring. Under the bridge as we crossed, a punt slipped ghostlike down stream; the subdued laughter of a girl and the muffled pleading of a man's voice reached us. Then memory assailed me. "They are even as you and I, Fiesole," my heart whispered, "even as you and I once were."

I fell to wondering, as I caught the moon shining through the lace-work parapet of Magdalene tower, how many such love-affairs of lightness it had seen commenced.

At the door of the house in which she lodged we halted abruptly.

"So this is the end," she said. Then, feigning cheerfulness, she ran up the steps, crying, "Good luck to you on your journey."

From the pavement I called to her, "I'm afraid, I've kept you out late, I——"

The door banged.

I had had much to say to her. Now that she was gone the thoughts and words bayed in my brain like bloodhounds. There were apologies, excuses, explanations—kind, meaningless phrases, which would have held a meaning of comfort for her. It was too late now. For a moment her shadow fell across the blind; then her arm was raised and the light went out.

CHAPTER XII

THE BACK-DOOR OF THE WORLD

THE Englishman is brought up to live his life independently of woman. He considers his masculine solitariness a sign of strength. To be seen in the streets with his wife or sisters is to acknowledge that they are necessary. He feels awkward at being observed publicly in their company. He shows them no gallantries. He walks a little way apart. His conversation with them lacks spontaneity. He is not enjoying himself. He is wanting to be kind and natural, but he dreads lest he should be thought effeminate. His national conception of manliness demands that he should be complete in himself. How he ever so forgets his shyness as to make a woman his wife is one of the unsolved mysteries. Some primeval instinct, deeper than his national training of reserve, goads him to it. On recovering from his madness, he is among the first to marvel.

When Christian had climbed to the top of the hill his sack of sins fell from his back. When an Englishman lands in France, he drops his bundle of moral scruples in the harbor as he passes down the gang-plank. For morality is a matter of temperament, and for the time being his temperament shall be French. Just as a soul newly departed, may look back with pitying resentment on the chill chaotic body that once confined it, so he looks back across the English Channel at the uncharming rectitude of his former self. Being an Englishman has bored him.

I shall never forget the first wild rapture with which I viewed the tall white cliffs of Dieppe. It was about three in the afternoon. The sky was intensely blue, dotted here and there with fleecy islands of cloud. The sun smote

down so hotly on the deck that one's feet felt swollen. Far away the gleaming quaintness of the French fishing-town grew up and stole nearer. It seemed to me that as the wind swept towards us from the land, I caught the merry frou-frou of ten thousand skirts. Fields and woodlands which topped the cliffs, hid laughing eyes and emotional white arms eagerly extended. The staccato chatter of happiness lay before me. I had escaped from the Eveless Paradise of my own countrymen. I had slipped out by the back-door of the world. I was free to act as I liked. I was unobserved. Discretion had lost its most obvious purpose. It excited me to pretend to myself that I was almost willing to be tempted.

That night I sat by the quays at Rouen, observing the groups of men and women, always together, passing up and down. I saw how they drew frankly near to one another. I listened to their scraps of quiet conversation. The lazy laughter, now the hoarse brass of men's voices, now the silver clearness of a woman's, rose and fell. Below me barges from Paris creaked against the piles, and the golden Seine swept beneath the bridges, singing like a gay grisette. As night sank down I was stung to loneliness, thinking of the absence of Vi and Fiesole.

I arrived in Paris on the evening of the following day. Hastily depositing my baggage at my hotel in the Rue St. Honoré, I set out to stroll the boulevards. Until three in the morning I wandered from café to café. I searched the faces of passers-by for signs of the gracious abandon to happiness of which I had so often heard. My mind teemed with vivid images of pleasure such as crowd the pages of novels concerning Paris. Flitting moth-like up and down garish tunnels of light I saw a painted death. It simpered at me from under shadows of austere churches. It flirted with me, ogling me with slanted eyes, as I passed beneath the glare of lamps. I crossed the Pont St. Michel going southward, and found it in the guise of girls masquerading in male attire. I went across the bridges again and found it in the Rue de Rivoli, hunting with jaded

feverish expression for men. Wherever I went I encountered the same fixed mercenary smile, saw the same lavish display of ankles beneath foamy skirts, and heard the same weary tip-tapping of feet which carried bodies which should be sold to whoever would purchase.

Where was the joy and adventure of which I had heard? The purpose of happiness should be life, not death. Several times that night women turned aside and seated themselves at a table beside me. They roused my pity; pity was quickly changed to disgust by their hot-foot avarice. All around me was a painted death.

Overhead the breeze ruffled the tree-tops. I looked up through the leaves. Stars were going out. I caught between roofs of tired houses a glimpse of the Eternal looking down. Surely the God who kept the wind going and replenished the sky with clouds, meant man to be happy in some better fashion. I went back to my hotel and, gathering together my baggage, fled.

At Florence the problem of right and wrong presented itself to me in another aspect. Restraint seemed attended with sadness; license with ugliness and regret. From above dim shrines disfigured Christs bespoke the anguish of crucified passions. On the other hand, Filippino's tattered *Magdalene* symbolized the hideous rewards of abandonment. Both restraint and unrestraint brought sorrow, and I wanted to be supremely glad. Life should be an affair of singing. I was fascinated by the thought of woman. With one woman I was in love; in another I was interested. Both of them I must forget. I would not love Fiesole because I could not marry Vi. Yet within me was this capacity for passion, smoldering, leaping, expanding, fighting for an outlet. Surely in a rightly governed world it should find some fine expression! Through the by-ways of every city that I entered the lean hound of vice hunted after nightfall, and behind him stalked the painted death. The cleanness of the country called me. Like a captive stag, I longed to feel the cool touch of leaves against my shoulders.

In the Accademia at Florence I discovered my own dilemma portrayed. It stated my problem, but it offered no solution. However, it gave me a sense of comradeship to find that Botticelli, so many years ago, had peered down over the same precipice. In *The Kingdom of Venus* one sees a flowered wood; from leafy trees hangs golden fruit; between their trunks drifts in the flaming light that never was on sea or land. Here a band of maidens have met with a solitary youth to celebrate the renewal of spring. In the center of the landscape, a little back from the group, stands a sad-faced Venus, who might equally well be a madonna listening for the dreadful beat of Gabriel's wings who shall summon her to be mother of a saviour to the world. To her left stand three wanton spirits of earth and air, innocently carnal, eternal in their loveliness. To her right three maidens dance with lifted hands. One of them gazes with melancholy desire towards the youth. He looks away from her unwillingly. In their eyes broods the gloomy foreknowledge of wrong-doing. They would fain be Grecians, but they have bowed to the Vatican. The shadows, the flowers, the rustling leaves are still pagan; but in the young girl's eyes hangs the memory of the tortured Christ. She is wanton in her scarcely veiled nakedness, but she dares not forget; and while she remembers, she cannot be happy. The lips with which she will woo her lover have worshiped the wound-prints of the pierced hand.

The Renaissance made even its sadness exquisite by using it as the vehicle for poetry; but we, having lost our sense of magic, explain our melancholy in mediæval terms. Magic was still in the world; I was determined to find it.

I was continually drawn back to the picture. I would sit before it for hours. It explained nothing. It offered no suggestions. It simply told me what I already knew about myself. But in watching it I found rest. Rebellion against social facts which turn love into lust left me. I came to see that a love which is unlawful is only lovely in its unfulfilment. The young girl in the woodland, did she rouse the frenzy in her lover, would lose the purity

which was irrecoverable; by evening she would weep among the broken flowers. Perhaps, did I win her, it might be so with Vi.

I tried to find satisfaction by losing myself in memories of the past. The past is always kindlier than the present because, as Carlyle once said, the fear has gone out of it. The heavy actuality of the sorrows of Romeos makes them pleasurable romance only to latter-day observers. In their own day they were scandals. So I wandered through sun-scorched Italian towns, red and white and saffron, and I hung above ancient bridges, looking down on rushing mountain torrents, and I dreamt myself back to the glory of the loves that had once been self-consuming beneath that forgetful hard blue sky.

When I came to Ferrara my mind was stormy with thoughts of Lucrezia Borgia—Lucrezia of the amber hair. It was here that she came in her pageantry of shame to seek her third husband in the unwilling Alphonso. Ferrara had not changed since that day. She had seen it as I saw it. I entered the town at sunset. The golden light smote against the red-brick walls of the Castello. I imagined that I saw her sweet wronged face, half-saint, half-siren, gazing out from the narrow barred windows across the green-scummed moat.

I hired rooms in the primitive *Pellegrino e Gaiana*. They looked out on the dusty tree-shadowed Piazza Torquato Tasso, where tables with white cloths were spread, on which stood tall bottles of rough country wine. I promised myself that from there, as I sat, I could just discern the Castello. I had my dinner beneath the trees. On the further side of the square was a wine tavern. Men and girls were singing there. Sometimes the door would push open, letting out a rush of light. I tried to think that they were the men-at-arms of long ago. A cool breeze stirred the dust at my feet. The moon was rising. I got up and sauntered through gaunt paved streets, past empty palaces, past Ariosto's house and out toward the country, where vines hung heavy with grapes, festooning the olive-

trees. Italy lay languorous and scented in the night, like a fair deep-bosomed courtesan. The sensuous delight of the present mingled with my thoughts of the past. I had been hardly surprised had Lucrezia stolen out from the dusk towards me, with the breeze whipping about her the golden snakes of her hair.

Slowly I turned back to the town. At the Castello I halted, peering across the moat at the sullen darkness of the walls on the other side. As I stood smoking my cigar, I saw an English girl coming towards me across the Piazza Savonarola. Her nationality was unmistakable; she walked with a healthy air of self-reliance which you do not find in Latin women. I was surprised to see her. July is not the month for tourists. So far, save for a few Americans, I had had Italy to myself. And I was surprised for another reason—she was unaccompanied.

As she drew nearer, I turned my back so that she should not be offended by my staring. I heard her step coming closer. It halted at my side. I looked round, supposing she had lost her direction and was about to question me.

"You—you here!" I exclaimed and remained staring.

"I didn't think you'd expect me," she laughed shyly.

"Of course I didn't. How should I? What brought you?"

"I was on my way to Venice; but remembering you were here, I stayed over for the night. You don't mind?"

"Mind! I should say not. Where are you staying?"

"At the *Albergo Europa*. I was just on my way over to the *Pellegrino e Gaiana* to inquire if you were there. I've asked at all the other hotels."

While we had been speaking I had been watching her closely. What was it that was changed in her? Was it the voluptuousness of the Italian night that made her more splendidly feminine? She had lost her laughing tone of laziness. Her beauty was strong wine and fire. Something had become earnest in her. Then I asked myself why had she come—was she really on her way to Venice?

"I'm jolly glad you came," I said impetuously; "I've been missing you ever since I left."

"And I you."

She took my arm, giving it a friendly hug, just as Ruthita did when she was glad. We walked over to the Piazza Torquato Tasso. Seating ourselves at a table beneath the trees, we called for wine. The light from the trattoria fell softly on her face. The air was dreamy with fragrance of limes. At tables nearby other men and women were sitting. Across the way in the tavern my men-at-arms were still singing and carousing.

"What are you thinking?" she asked, leaning across towards me.

"I was thinking that I now begin to understand you."

"In what way?" She jerked the question out. It was as though she had flung up her arms to ward off a blow. Her voice panted.

"You've always puzzled me," I said. "You are a mixture of ice and fire. The ice is English and the fire is Italian. You're different to-night."

"How?"

"You're mediæval. The fire has melted the ice."

She took my hand gratefully and drew me nearer. "Do you like me better?"

"Much better. I keep thinking how like you are to Simonetta in *The Kingdom of Venus*. I spent hours sitting before it at the Accademia in Florence. I couldn't tell what was the attraction. Now I know. It was you I was looking at; you as you are now—not as you were."

"Dante," she said, "you can see what is beautiful in a painting or a poem, but you can't see beauty in things themselves. You're afraid to—you're afraid of being disillusioned. You see life as reflected in a mirror."

"It's safer," I smiled.

She took me up sharply. There was pain in what she said. "Ah, yes, safer! You're always counting the cost and looking ahead for sorrow. You're a pagan, but fear makes you an ascetic. You have the feeling that joy is

something stolen, and you grow timid lest you're going to be bad."

"That's true."

"Can't you believe," she whispered, "that anything that makes two people happy must be right and best?"

"I wish I could."

"And that anything that makes them sad must be wicked?"

"Fiesole," I said, "have you been sad?"

She would not answer, but drew herself back into the shadow so I could not see her expression. We sat silent, fingering our glasses, giving ourselves over to the languor of the summer's night. Through the rapturous stillness we heard the breeze from the mountains rustling across the Emilian plain like a woman in silk attire. At a neighboring table a man and a girl, thinking themselves unobserved, swayed slowly towards one another and kissed, as though constrained by some power stronger than themselves. Through the golden windows of the tavern across the way, one could see the silhouettes of men and women trail stealthily across the white-washed walls. The spirit of Lucrezia and her lover-poets seemed to haunt Ferrara that night.

"You're going to Venice," I said abruptly. "So am I. Perhaps we shall meet there."

"Perhaps."

"We might travel there together."

"I should be glad."

We rose from the table. It was late. The piazza was growing empty. The apple-green shutters before the windows of the houses were closed. Behind some of them were lights which threw gold bars on the pavement. The streets were silent.

"How did you know that I would be here?" I asked.

"You forget—you left me your addresses."

"So I did. But you didn't write. Why didn't you write?"

"I was afraid you wouldn't understand."

What she meant by that I could only guess. Perhaps she hardly knew herself. My blood was rushing wildly through my veins. I was breathing the atmosphere of passion. I did not look ahead; I was absorbed in the present. I had been hungry for Vi—well, now I had Fiesole. I had been thirsty for the love of a woman. Fiesole was giving me her comradeship. I was intoxicated with life's beauty.

The saffron moon looked down, pillowed on a bank of silver cloud. As we passed the Castello, a fish leapt in the moat, and fell back with a splash. I halted, leaning against the parapet.

"And it was here we met."

She pressed against me. I could feel the wild beating of her heart; it tapped against my side, calling to my heart for entrance. Her voice shook with emotion; it whispered above the surge of conflicting thoughts like the solemn tolling of a sunken bell. "Since then everything has become golden, somehow."

I dared not trust myself to respond to her tenderness. I was shaken and awed by her intensity. With her lips just a little way from mine, so that my cheeks were fanned by her breath, her face looked into mine, the chin tilted and the long white throat stretched back. I gazed on her motionless, with my arms strained down against my side.

"Fiesole," I whispered, "how many girls and boys have stood here and said that!"

Her eagerness died out. She slipped her arm into mine. "But we are alive. I was thinking of nobody but our two selves to-night."

We plunged into the cool deep shadows of the colonnade. We turned into the Corso della Giovecca. Down the long dim street all the houses stood in darkness, save for a faint patch of light which carpeted the pavement in front of her hotel.

"Your maid will be wondering what has happened."

She looked at me curiously. "She won't. I didn't bring her."

"Good-night until to-morrow."

"Good-night."

She looked back once from the doorway and smiled. She entered. The sleepy porter came out and swung to the gates.

I was amazed at her bewitching indiscretion. For myself it did not matter. But what of her, if we should be seen together? A man can afford such accidents; but a woman—— I tried to deceive myself. Our meeting was, as she had said, haphazard. We were both alone in Italy. Our routes lay in the same direction. What more natural than that we should travel together? But I knew that this was not the case. I determined to open her eyes to the risks she was taking.

Next morning when I woke, I wondered vaguely what was the cause of this strange elation. Then memory came back. I jumped out of bed and flung the shutters wide. Out in the piazza some earlier risers were already seated at the tables. A man was watering the pavement, singing gaily to himself. Beneath the trees a parrot and a cockatoo screeched, hurling insults at one another from their perches. A soldier showed his teeth and laughed, talking to a broad-hipped peasant girl. At the top of the piazza a slim white figure waited.

I made haste with my dressing. I was extremely happy. I tried to analyze the situation, but lost patience with myself.

Picking up my hat and running down the stairs, I came across her standing outside the Cathedral, in the full glare of the sun. Before I had spoken she turned, darting like a pigeon, instinctively aware of my approach. "I've beaten you by nearly two hours," she called gaily.

We passed into the fruit-market. I bought a basket of ripe figs; sitting down on a bench we ate them together. All round us was stir and bustle. Farmers in their broad straw-hats were unyoking oxen while women spread the wares.

"Fiesole, there's just one thing I want to say to you, after which I'll never mention it."

"I know what it is. I've thought it all out."

"Are you sure you have? Of course no one may ever know. But if by some chance they should find out, are you sure that you think it's worth while?"

"Reckoning the cost again!" she laughed, helping herself to another fig.

"I'll pay gladly. It's you I'm considering," I said seriously.

She rested her hand on mine. It was cool, and long, and delicate. I was startled at the thrill it gave me. "Dante," she whispered, "have you ever wanted anything so badly that your whole body ached to get it? When you were very thirsty, say, and you heard a stream, singing 'Find me. Find me' out of sight in the hills among the heather? Then you climbed up and up, and the sun beat down, and your throat was dry, and the stream sang louder, and at last you found it. I'm like that. I don't mind what the bank is like. I lie down full-length and let the water sing against my mouth. I've been thirsty for something, Dante, all my life. Yes, I've counted the price. If you don't mind having me, Dannie, I'll stay with you for the present."

She rubbed her cheek against my shoulder ever so slightly. I bent towards her. When you've wounded a woman, there's only one way of making recompense. She saw my intent. She drew back laughing, dragging my hand with her. The quick red blood mounted to her forehead. The gold in her green eyes sparkled with gladness. "Not now," she cried. Then recovering herself, "But you're a dear to want me like that."

That morning we visited the Corpus Domini where Lucrezia Borgia lies buried. We were admitted to a little chapel where all was lonely and silent. Presently a door opened and two nuns dressed in black entered. Their faces were covered from sight by long black veils. All that was human we were permitted to see of them was

their eyes, which looked out from two black holes like stars in a dreary night. They had been beautiful perhaps, but because Christ was crucified they had crucified themselves. And these women, who had never tasted life, whose flesh had never throbbed with the sweet torture which was their right, whose bodies were the unremembered sepulchres of little children whose lips had never pressed the breast—these women were the guardians of her who had been the Magdalene of the Renaissance, whose feet had climbed the Calvary of passion, but not the Calvary of sacrifice. Sunlight, amber-colored as Lucrezia's hair, slipped across the slab which marked her grave. Down there in the unbroken dusk, did her tresses mock decay?

From a hidden cloister the chanting of children's voices broke the quiet. Its very suddenness took me by the throat. It was the future calling out of the sad and moldering content of stupidly misspent lives. Fiesole edged her hand into mine. I smiled into her eyes; then I looked at the nuns again. Who would remember them when three centuries had gone by? Lucrezia, if she had been wanton, had at least given joy; so the world forgave her now that she was buried. We tiptoed out into the tawny street, where water tinkled down the gutters. We had found a new sanction for desire.

It was towards evening that we sighted Venice, floating between sea and sky in a tepid light. Where we parted from the mainland, thin trees ran down to the water's edge, shivering and gleaming, like naked boys. As the train thundered across the trestled bridge which spans the lagoon, Fiesole and I crowded against the window, tingling with excitement. The salt wind smote upon our faces and loosened a strand of her red-brown hair. Laughing, I fastened it into place. She snatched up my hand and kissed the fingers separately. We were children, so thrilled with happiness that we could speak only by signs and exclamations. A gondola drifted by, rowed by a poppe in a scarlet sash. Though we both saw it, we cried to

one another that it was a gondola, and waved. Then the gold sun fell splashing through the clouds; Venice was stained to orange, and the lagoon to the purple of wine.

Not until the train had halted in the station did it occur to me that we had made no plans.

Hotel porters were already fighting to get possession of our baggage.

"Where are you going to stay?" I asked.

"Wherever you like," she said. "A good place is the *Hotel D'Angleterre* on the Riva degli Schiavoni."

So she took it for granted that we should put up at the same hotel! We went aboard the steamer and traveled down the Grand Canal in prosaic fashion, with the nodding black swans of gondolas all about us.

The *Hotel D'Angleterre* stands facing the Canale di San Marco, looking across to San Maria della Salute. The angle is that from which so many of Canaletto's Venetian masterpieces were painted.

The proprietor came out to greet us suave and smiling. "A room for Monsieur and Madame?"

"Two rooms," I said shortly.

When we went upstairs to look at them, we found that they were next door to one another. Fiesole made no objection.

They were both front rooms and faced the Canal. One could hardly find fault with them on the ground that they were too near together.

By the time dinner was over the silver dusk was falling. A hundred yards out two barche, a little distance separated, drifted with swinging lanterns. The tinkling of guitars sounded and the impassioned singing of a girl. Above embattled roofs of palaces to the westward fiery panthers of the sunset crouched. The beauty of it all was stinging—it seemed the misty fabric of a dream which must instantly shatter and fade into a pale and torturing remembrance.

We stepped into a gondola.

She spoke a few hasty words in Italian, then we stole out from the quay across the velvet blackness.

"Where are we going?" I asked her.

"Round the old canals of the Rialto."

Soon every sound, even the faint sounds of Venice, grew fainter and vanished. Only the dip of the oar was heard, the water lapping, and the weird plaintive cry of the poppe as we approached a corner, "A-òel," and "Sia stali" or "Sia premi" as we turned. We crept along old waterways where the oozy walls ground against the gondola on either side. Far, far up the narrow ribbon of ink-blue sky and the twinkling of stars looked down. Fiesole cuddled against me, like a contented tired child. I kept thinking of what she had said, "Have you ever wanted anything so badly that your whole body ached to get it?" I wondered if she had got that something now.

When we returned to the hotel it was past midnight. The sharp tang of morning was in the air. Lights which had blazed across the lagoon, now smoldered like torches burnt to the socket. Venice floated, a fair Ophelia with eyes drowned and hair disordered; one saw her mistily as through water.

Our gondola creaked against the landing, banged by the little waves. A poppe in a nearby barca groaned in his sleep and stirred. We were cramped with our long sitting. I gave Fiesole my arm; she shrank against me. At the door of her room I paused.

"We've had one brilliant day to remember. You're happy now?"

"Very happy, dear Dante."

I entered my room and sat down in the dark on the side of the bed.

I did not love her. I blundered my way over all the old arguments. I told myself that, since I could not marry Vi, I could not do better than marry Fiesole. But at the thought my soul rebelled—it was treachery. I tried to expel Vi's image from my mind, but it refused to be expelled. I lived over again all the intoxicating pleasure of the day, but it was Vi who was my companion. I only drugged myself with Fiesole. She appealed to my imag-

ination; her loveliness went like a strong wine to my head.

In the next room all sounds of stirring had ceased. I looked up; greyhound clouds, long and lean, coursed in pursuit of stars across the moon. I tiptoed to the window. As I leant out, I heard a faint sighing. I caught the glint of copper-gold hair poured across the sill of the neighboring window. Fearing she might see me, I drew back. Why was it, I asked myself, that Fiesole was not my woman? What was the reason for this fantastic loyalty to Vi, who could never be mine? Was it instinct that held me back from Fiesole or mere cold-heartedness?

For the next three days we wandered Venice, doing the usual round of churches and palaces. I was feverishly careful to live my life with Fiesole in public. I feared for her sake to be left alone with her. There was protection in spectators. She understood and accepted the situation, though we had not discussed it together. She played the part of a daring boy, carrying herself with merry independence. At times I almost forgot she was a girl. She disarmed my watchfulness, and seemed bent on showing me that it was unnecessary.

On the morning of the fourth day, we returned to déjeuner parched and footsore from exploring the stifling alleys which lie back of the Rialto. The air was heavy and sultry. The water seemed to boil in the canals. Every stone flung back the steady glare. Blue lagoons, polished as reflectors, mirrored the blue of the cloudless sky.

From where we sat at table, we could see crowded steamers draw in at the pier and crawl like flies across the bay to Lido.

Fiesole made a queer little face at me. "Stupid old sober-sides!"

"What's the matter?"

She flung herself back in her chair, regarding me with a languid, arch expression. "I'm tired of fudging in and out of old palaces and churches. I came here to enjoy myself. If I promise to be a good girl, will you take me to

Lido to bathe? We'll have one dear little afternoon all to ourselves."

A warm breeze caught us on the steamer. What ripe lips Fiesole had, and what inscrutable eyes! Since that first night of our arrival, she had prevented me from treating her with any of the privileges of her sex. She had walked when and where she liked. She had insisted on paying her share of everything down to the last centesimi. Now she changed her mood and slipped her arm through mine. We had both grown tired of pretending she was a man. "You needn't be afraid to be nice to me," she said.

There were lovers all about us: girls from the glass-factories in white dresses, bareheaded, with tasseled black shawls; sailors from the Arsenal with keen bronzed faces and silky mustaches. Venice was taking a day off and giving us a lesson in happiness. The self-consciousness of the Anglo-Saxon, which makes the expression of pleasure bad taste and distressing, was absent. Each was occupied with him or herself, sublimely unconscious of spectators.

"Haven't I been nice?"

She patted my hand, entirely the woman now. "You've been trying to be correct. Why can't you be your own dear self?"

Taking the tram across the island, we came to the Stabilimento dei Bagni. We walked through the arcade and down on to the terrace. The sea rolled in flashing, green and silver, in a long slow swell. Leaning over the side, we watched the bathers. Men, with costumes unfastened at the shoulders, sifted golden sand through their fingers on to their naked chests. Women lay beside them, buried in the sand, laughing and chatting.

I noticed a blond young giant standing at the water's edge. His face kindled. I followed the direction in which he was looking. A dark-eyed girl had come out of her cabin. She wore a single-piece, tight-fitting suit of stock-ingette, which displayed her figure in all its splendid curves. Her face was roguish and vivid as that of Carmen. On her head she wore a scarlet turban. Her costume was sky blue.

The men who had been lying on their backs, turned over and regarded her with lazy admiration of her physical loveliness. Seemingly unaware of the interest she aroused, she came tripping daintily to the water's edge, her white limbs flashing. The man held out his hand. With little birdlike exclamations she ran to him; then drew back and shivered as the first wave rippled about her feet. He encouraged her with tender, quickly spoken words. Her timidity was all a pretty pretense and they both knew it; but it gave them a chance to be charming to one another. He seized her hand again; she hung back from him laughing. Then they waded out together, hand-in-hand, splashing up diamonds as they went. They seemed to see no one but each other; they eyed one another innocently, unabashed. When they came to the deeper water, she clasped her arms about his neck; he swam out toward the horizon with her riding on his back. He was like a young sea-god capturing a land-maiden.

A stab of envy shot through me. I felt indignant with my inherited puritanism. It would not permit me simply to enjoy myself. I must be forever analyzing motives, and lifting the lid off the future to search for consequences.

I looked at Fiesole. Her eyes were starry. They seemed to mock me and plead with me saying, "Oh, Dannie, why can't we be like that?"

I glanced down at the beach. The bathers were rising up and shaking off the sand. I noticed that only the women who had no beauty hid themselves behind bathing-skirts. The Italian standard of modesty!—you only need be modest when you have something to be ashamed of. I accepted the standard.

Fiesole broke the silence, clapping her hands, crying "Wasn't she perfect!" Then she took hold of my face in childish excitement and turned my head. "Oh, look there!"

An English girl had come out. Her bathing-suit was drab-colored and baggy. Sagging about her knees hung an ugly skirt. In her clothes she might have been pretty;

but now she was awkward and embarrassed. Her manner called attention to the fact that she was more sparsely clad than usual. She wore tight round her forehead a wretched waterproof cap.

"There's Miss England," laughed Fiesole.

"When we bathe, you be Miss Italy," I laughed back.

And she was.

When I look back to that sunny July afternoon with the blue and silver Adriatic singing against the lips of the land, the warm wind blowing toward the shore from Egypt's way, the daring flashing of slim white bodies tossed high by glistening waves, and the undercurrent merriment of laughter and secret love-making, I know that I had ventured as far as is safe into the garden which knows no barriers. It is as I saw her then that I like to remember Fiesole. I can see her coming down the golden sands, with a tress of her gold-red hair, that had escaped, lying shining between her breasts. I recall her astonishing girlishness, which she had hidden from me so long. Like a wild thing of the woods, she came to me at last, timid in her daring, halting to glance back at the green covert, advancing again with glad shy gestures. Whatever had gone before was gallant make-belief. Without a word spoken, as her eyes met mine she told me all at the water's edge.

That afternoon I learnt the absurd delirium that may overtake a man who is owned in public by a pretty woman. She was the prettiest woman in Italy that day from her small pink feet to her golden crown. And she knew it. She treated me as though I was hers and, forgetting everything, I was glad of it. I can still thrill with the boyish pride I felt when I fastened her dress, with all the beach watching. Whatever she asked me to do was a delightful form of flattery. It pleased me to know that others were suffering the same pangs of envy that I had felt. They were saying to themselves, "How charming she is! What a lucky fellow! That's what youth can do for you. I wonder whether they're married."

Tucking her arm under mine with a delicious sense of proprietorship, we set out with the crowd through the tropic growth of flowers to the pier from where the steamer started. A little way ahead I saw the blond giant with his gay little sweetheart. He was all care of her. She fluttered about him like a blue butterfly about a tall sunflower. She looked up into his face, making impertinent grimaces. He nodded his head and laughed down.

Was it only the spirit of imitation that caused us to copy them? They gave us a glimpse into the tender lovers' world, which we both were sick with longing to enter. If Fiesole was playing a part she played it well. Her cheeks flushed and her eyes were brilliant. She made me feel the same bewilderment of gladness I had felt all those years ago, as a boy at the Red House. How much it would have meant to me then if she had treated me as she did now!

We crossed the bay towards the hour of sunset. Venice swooned in a golden haze. Clouds struck sparks from the burning disk, like hammers falling on a glowing anvil. The lagoon stared at the sky without a quiver. We traveled a pathway of molten fire.

"We must live this day out," I said as we landed. "Let's go to the Bauer-Grünwald to-night."

We hurried upstairs and changed into evening-dress. I tapped at her door, asking, "Are you ready?"

"All except some hooks and eyes. Come in," she replied.

She was seated before the looking-glass, with her arms curved upward, tucking a bow of black ribbon in her hair. It was her reflection that looked into my face and smiled.

"You do me proud, Fiesole," I said, remembering one of Vi's phrases.

She looked as simple as a sixteen year old girl. Her dress was of pale green satin, cut high in the waist in Empire fashion, hanging without fullness to just above her ankles. The sleeves left off at the elbows. Her wonderful russet hair was gathered into a loose knot and lay coiled

along her neck. She was the Fiesole of my school-days. Had she intended to remind me?

I sat down on the edge of the bed while she finished her dressing, following with my eyes the feminine nicks-nacks which were strewn about. But always my eyes came back to her, with the mellow glory from the window transfiguring her face and neck. There was a nipping sweetness in being so near to a woman whom I could not hope to possess. I knew that without marrying her I could not keep her. Platonic friendships are only safe between men and women whose youth is withered. I was wise enough to know that. We were chance-met travelers in Lovers' Land—truants who would soon be dragged back. I kept saying to myself, "Intimacy such as we have can go but a short way further; any hour all this may end."

Then I tried to imagine how this evening would seem to me years hence. The poignancy of life's changefulness made me wistful. One day we should both be old. We should be free from tempestuous desires. The generous fires of youth would have burnt out. We should know the worth then of the pleasures we now withheld from one another. We should meet, having grown commonsense or satiated, and would wonder wherein lay the mastering attraction we had felt—from what source we had stolen our romance. We should be weary then, walking where our feet now ran. Why could we not last out this moment forever?

She rose, shaking down her skirt and courting my admiration.

"You may get to work on the hooks and eyes, old boy."

Her voice was jerky with excitement. My fingers were awkward with trembling. As I leant over her, she patted my cheek, flashing a caress with her eyes. "Do you know, you're handsome, Dante?"

I wanted to crush her in my arms, but my habitual restraint prevented. I should destroy the virginal quality in her—something which could never be put back. My

mind conjured the scene. I saw her folded against me, her eyes brimming up to mine in tender amazement. But my arms went on with their business, as though some strong power held them down.

"It's done. Come, bambino, it's getting late."

She followed me down the stairs. My senses were reeling with the maddening fragrance of her presence. We walked through the Piazzetta and Piazza di San Marco, through the narrow streets and across the bridges till we arrived at the garden beside the canal. Arbors were illuminated with faery-lamps. It seemed a scene staged for a theatre rather than a living actuality. Gondolas stole past the garden through the dusk. Mysterious people alighted. Guitars tinkled. In tall mediæval houses rising opposite, lamps flashed and women looked down. As specters in a dream, people leant above the bridge, gazed into the water, and vanished. Venice walked with slippered feet and finger to lips that night.

The silence shivered; a clear peal of laughter rippled on the air. We turned. The girl with the young sea-god was entering the garden. They seated themselves at a table near us—so near that we could watch their expressions and overhear much that was said. It seemed they were fated to goad us on and make us ambitious of attaining their happiness.

Fiesole stretched out her hands. I smiled and took them, holding them palms up. "They're like petals of pink roses," I said.

Her face was laughing. "Do you think I'm pretty?"

"I've always thought that, and you know it—ever since you wouldn't kiss me in Sneard's garden."

"It was you who wouldn't ask to be kissed," she pouted. "What you could have, you didn't value. It's the same now."

Her hands quivered; her lips became piteous. All the wild commotion of her heart seemed to travel through them to myself. My throat became suddenly parched.

"You know how it is, Fiesole. It isn't that I haven't

affection for you; but to do that kind of thing, if I don't intend to make you more to me, wouldn't be fair."

"But if I want it? What if I were to tell you, Dante, that you're the only man I've ever cared for? What if I were to tell you that you've always been first in my heart, ever since we first met?"

I looked away from her to the street of water. I had nothing with which to answer. She tried to drag her hands from me, but still I held them.

"Dante," she whispered, "look at me." Her voice grew fainter. "I'm not speaking of marriage. Two people can be kind to one another without that."

"And have I been unkind?"

She turned from my question. "You can never marry her," she said. "You know that."

A long silence elapsed, which was broken by voices of the girl and her lover at the neighboring table. Fiesole spoke again. "They're not married. They never will be married. And yet they can share with one another one little corner of their lives."

"For me it's all or nothing," I said. "If it wasn't all, I should be forever thinking of the end. That's how I'm made—it's my training. If I did anything to you, Fiesole, that wounded you ever so little, I should hate myself. Wherever you were, I should be thinking of you—wanting to leave everything to come to you. I can't forget. My conscience would give me no rest."

She drew her hands free. "And yet you're wounding me now."

She was always different from other women, doing the unexpected. Instead of sitting melancholy through dinner, she broke into a burst of high spirits. She told me about her father, who had marched with Garibaldi. She rallied me on the awkward little boy I had been when first we met—all arms, and legs, and shyness. She talked of love in a bantering fashion, as insanity of the will. One minute she was the cynical woman of the world—the next the innocent young school-girl. She puzzled and played

with me. Then she fell back into the vein of tenderness, recalling the good times we had had, stampeding through the Cotswolds in springtime with the mad wind blowing.

It was nearing midnight when we rose. Going down the little garden, we halted on the steps by the canal. A dozen shadowy figures leapt up with hoarse cries. We beckoned to a poppe; the gondola stole up and we entered.

"Don't go back yet," Fiesole pleaded.

We crept through ancient waterways, all solitary and silent; past churches blanched in the moonlight, and empty piazzas; under bridges from which some solitary figure leant to observe us. Now a swiftly moving barca would overtake us; as it fled by we had a glimpse through the curtains of a man and a woman sitting close together. Now the door of a tavern would suddenly open, flinging across the water a bar of garish light; cloaked figures would emerge and the door would close as suddenly as it had opened. Overhead in balconies we sometimes detected the stir of life where we had thought there was emptiness, and would catch the rustle of a woman's dress or see the red flare of a cigarette. We had the haunted sensation one has in a wood in May-time: though he discerns but little with the eye, he is conscious that behind green leaves an anonymous, teeming world is mating and providing for its momentous cares.

Fiesole pressed against me; the darkness seemed to fling out hands, thrusting us together. She slipped off her hood and pushed back her cloak, displaying her arms and throat and hair. The seduction of her beauty enthralled and held me spellbound. The air pulsed with illicit influences. The dreaming city, vague and labyrinthine, was the outward symbol of my state of mind. I had lost my standards; my will-power was too inert to rouse itself for their recovery. I was entranced by a sensuous inner vision of loveliness which exhausted my faculties of resistance. I apprehended some fresh allurements of femininity through each portal of sense. Fiesole's touch made my flesh burn; her eyes stung me to pity; her voice caressed me. Her

body relaxed till it rested the length of mine. Her head lay against my shoulder; her arms were warm about my neck. I tried to think—to think of honor and duty; but I could only think of her.

"You know what you said about Simonetta," she whispered; "how you thought I was like her and you spent hours before *The Kingdom of Venus*. You were wrong, all wrong, Dante, in your thoughts about her. The young man in the picture was Giuliano dei Medici and Simonetta was dear to him for many years. So the flowers weren't broken, Dannie. Instead of broken flowers, they made poetry for Botticelli to paint."

How could I tell her that there was a difference between love and passion?—that my feeling for her could be only passion, because my love was with Vi? She loved me—that made all her actions pure. Morality would sound like the rasping voice of a tired schoolmaster, scolding a classroom of healthy boys. It was even unsafe for me to pity her; when I drew my coat about her, she kissed my hand. I clasped her closely, gazing straight ahead, not daring to look down. Every quiver of her languorous body communicated itself.

"Fiesole, if I don't marry her, I will marry you some day. I promise."

"But I want you now—now—now." Her whisper was sharp-edged with longing; it beat me down and ran out among the shadows like a darting blade.

We floated under the Bridge of Sighs and drew up at the landing. She leant heavily on my arm. We walked along the quay in silence. Few people were about. I saw mistily; my eyes were burning as if they had gazed too long into a glowing furnace. She drooped against me like a crushed flower.

"You're breaking my heart, Fiesole. I'd give you anything, but the thing that would hurt you. Let me have time to consider."

I was saying to myself, "Perhaps it would be right to marry her." But the memory of her whisper clamored

insistently in my ears and prevented me from thinking, "*I want you now—now—now.*" With her voice she made no reply.

We entered the hotel and stole past the office; the porter was sleeping with his head bowed across his arms. On the dimly lit stairs she dragged on my arm, so that I halted. Suddenly she freed herself and broke from me, running on ahead.

Standing still, almost hiding from her, I listened for her door to open and shut. Nothing stirred. I crept along the naked passage and found her leaning against the wall outside our rooms. Her head was thrown back in weariness, not in defiance; her arms were spread out helplessly; her hands, with palms inward, wandered blindly over the wall's surface. She was panting like a hunted fawn. Her knees shook under her. Her attitude was horribly that of one who had been crucified.

Made reckless by remorse, I bent over her and kissed her. Because I did not put my arms about her, she made no response.

Something happened, wholly inexplicable, as though we had been joined by a third presence. Not a stair creaked. Everyone was in bed. The air was flooded with the slow, sweet smell of violets. I became aware of a palpitating sense of moral danger.

I drew back from Fiesole. Her physical fascination faded from me; yet I had never felt more tender towards her.

"I'm sorry, dear," I said.

She met my gaze with a frozen, focusless expression of despair. Her hands ceased their wandering.

I entered my room and, closing the door, stood pressed against the panel, listening. After what seemed an interminable silence, her door opened and shut. I looked out into the passage; it was empty.

I spent a sleepless night and rose with my mind made up; since she wanted it I would marry her.

Going downstairs, I found she had not breakfasted. As a rule she was an earlier riser than myself; usually I found her waiting for me. I went for a stroll on the Piazzetta to give her time. On my return she had not appeared. I was beginning to grow nervous; then it occurred to me that she was postponing the first awkwardness of meeting me by breakfasting in bed.

Taking my place at our table in the window, I told the waiter to carry Fiesole's rolls and coffee up to her bedroom. He looked a trifle blank, and hurried away without explanation. He returned, followed by the proprietor, who informed me with much secret amusement that the signora had called for her bill at seven o'clock that morning and had departed, taking her baggage. I inquired if she had left any message for me; the proprietor stifled a laugh and shook his head. I immediately looked up trains, to discover which one she had intended catching. There was one which had left Venice at eight for Milan. At the station I found that a lady resembling Fiesole had taken a ticket for the through-journey. By this time it was ten; the next train did not leave till two o'clock. I sent a telegram to catch her at Brescia, to be delivered to her in the carriage. No reply had been returned by the time I left Venice. I reached Milan in the evening and pursued my inquiries till midnight, but could get no trace of her. Either I had been mistaken in her direction, or she had alighted at one of the intermediate stations.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TURNING POINT

BEFORE my experience at Venice the world had consisted for me of Vi, myself, and other people; now it was only myself and Vi. I spent my days in shadowy unreality; just as a child, waking from a bad dream, sees one face he can trust gazing over the brink of his horror, so out of the blurred confusion of my present I saw the face of Vi.

Fiesole had not shown me love in its purity, but she certainly had taught me something of its courage and selfishness. She had disabused my mind forever of the thought that it was a polite, intensified form of liking. A blazing ship, she had met me in mid-ocean and had set my rigging aflame. I had turned from her, but not in time to get off scatheless. Her wild unrestraint had accustomed my imagination to phases of desire which had before seemed abnormal and foreign to my nature.

When I missed her at Milan, I abandoned my pursuit of her. Now that the temptation was over, I realized how near we had come to wrecking each other's lives. Physical lassitude overtook me. Because I had withstood Fiesole, I thought myself safe in indulging my fancy with more intimate thoughts of Vi. I excused myself for so doing, by telling myself that it was her memory that had made me strong to escape. It was like saying that because water had rescued me from fire it could no longer drown me.

I traveled northwards into the mountains to Baveno. Each morning I rowed across Maggiore to the island of Isola Madre. Lying beneath the camphor trees, watching the turquoise of the lake filling in the spaces between the

yellowing bamboo canes, I gave rein to my longing. Shadowy foliage dripped from shadowy trees, curtaining the glaring light; down spy-hole vistas of overgrown pathways I watched the lazy world drift by. I numbed my cravings with the opiate of voluptuous beauty.

I had been there a fortnight when a letter from home arrived. With its confident domestic chatter, it brought a message of trust. It took from me my sense of isolation. One of them would understand.

Slowly the thought had taken shape within me that I must go to Vi. If I saw her only once again, I believed that I would be satisfied. It would not be necessary to speak to her—that would be unsportsmanlike if she had managed to forget me. All I asked was to be allowed just once to look upon her face. She should not know that I was near her; I would look at her and go away. With that strange sophistry that we practise on ourselves, I tried to be persuaded that, were I to see her in her own surroundings with her husband and Dorrie, it would be a lesson to me of how little share I had in her life. Perhaps I had even idealized her memory; seeing her might cure me. So I reasoned, but I was conscious that my own judgment on the wisdom of such a step was not to be trusted. Ruthita was too young to tell. My father, though I admired him, was not the man to whom a son would willingly betray a weakness. I would speak to the Snow Lady.

As I drove from the station through London, old scenes and memories woke to life. The city had spread out towards Stoke Newington, so that it had lost much of its quaintness; but it retained enough of its old-world quiet to put me in touch with my childhood.

I alighted at the foot of Pope Lane. The wooden posts still stood there to shut out traffic. I walked quickly up the avenue of fragrant limes with the eager expectancy of one who had been years absent instead of days. In the distance I heard the rumble of London. The golden August evening lay in pools upon the pathway. Sensations of the happy past came back. Dead memories stirred, plucking

at my heartstrings. I thought of how Ruthita and I had bowled hoops and played marbles on that same gray pavement, making the air ring with our childish voices. I thought of those rare occasions when the Spuffler had carried me away with him into a boy's world of mysterious small things, which he knew so well how to find. All the comings and goings of school-days, immense exaltations and magnified tragedies, rose before me—Ruthita waiting to catch first sight of me, and Ruthita running beside the dog-cart, with flushed cheeks and hair flying, to share the last of me as I drove away. What had happened since then seemed for the moment but an interlude in the momentous play.

Passing between the steeply-rising red-brick walls, dotted with gates, I came to the door through which I had been so eager to escape when it had been locked against me. I reflected that I had not gained much from the new things which I had dragged into my life. The narrowness which I had once detested as imprisoned dullness I now coveted as peaceful security.

I found the bell beneath the Virginia creeper. The door was opened by Hetty. Hetty had grown buxom and middle-aged. Her sweetheart had never come for her. The tradesmen no longer made love to her; they left their goods perfunctorily and went out in search of younger faces. Her hips had broadened. The curve between her bust and her waist had vanished. The dream of love was all that she had gained from life. I wondered whether she still told herself impossible stories of the deliverance wrought by marriage. If she did, no signs of her romantic tendencies revealed themselves in her face. Her expression had grown vacantly kind and stolid. To me she was respectful nowadays, and seemed even distressed by the immodesty of the memory that I had once been the little boy whom she had spanked, spoilt, bathed, and dried.

She gave a quick cry at catching sight of me, for I had warned no one of my coming.

"Sh! where are they?" I asked her.

She told me that the master was at work in his study, and that Miss Ruthita and her ma were in the garden.

I walked round the house slowly, lasting out the pleasure of their surprise. Nothing seemed to have changed except we people. Sunflowers kept guard in just the same places, like ranks of lean soldiers wearing golden helmets. Along the borders scarlet geraniums flared among the blue of lobelia and the white of featherfew, just as they had when I was a boy. Pigeons, descendants of those whose freedom I had envied, perched on the housetops opposite, or wheeled against the encrimsoned sky.

I stole across the lawn to where two stooping figures sat with their backs towards me. Halfway across I halted, gazing over my shoulder. Through the study-window, with ivy aslant the pane, I saw my father. His hair was white. In the stoop of his shoulders was the sign of creeping age. He did not look up to notice me; he had never had time. As the years went by I grew proudly sorry for him. I saw him now, as I had seen him so many times when I paused to glance up from my play. He was cramped above his desk, writing, writing. His face was turned away. His head was supported on his hand as though weary. *He* was the prisoner now; it was I who held the key of escape. How oddly life had changed!

Ruthita saw me. Her sewing fell from her lap. In a trice she was racing towards me.

"You! You!" she cried.

Her thin arms went round me. Suddenly I felt miles distant from her because I was unworthy.

"Why did you come back?" she asked me. There was a note of anxiety in her voice. She searched my bronzed face.

"To see you, chickabiddy."

"No, no. That's not true," she whispered; but she pressed her cheek against my shoulder as though she were willing to distrust her own denial. "You can get on quite well without me, Dannie; you would never have come back to see me only."

The Snow Lady touched me on the elbow. Her eyes were excited and full of questioning. She gazed quickly from me to Ruthita. With a self-consciousness which was foreign to both of us, we dropped our eyes under her gaze and separated. Ruthita excused herself, saying that she would go and tell my father.

The Snow Lady offered me her cheek; it was soft and velvety. Slipping her arm through mine, she led me away to the apple-tree under which they had been sitting. She was still the frail little Madam Favart, half-frivolous, half-saintly; my father's intense reticence had subdued, but not quite silenced her gaiety. Her silver hair was as abundant as ever and her figure as girlish; but her face had tired lines, especially about the eyes. I sat myself on the grass at her feet.

"How is he?" I asked.

"Your father?"

"Yes."

"Much the same. He doesn't change."

"Is he still at the same old grind?"

She nodded. "But, Dante," she said, "you look thinner and older."

"That's the heat and the rapid traveling. A day or two's rest'll put me right."

She dropped her sewing into her lap and, pressing her cool hand against my forehead, drew me back against her. It was a mothering love-trick of hers that had lasted over from my childhood.

"What brought you home so suddenly, laddie?"

Her hand slipped to my shoulder. I bent aside and kissed it. "To see you and Ruthie. I had something to tell you."

She narrowed her eyes shrewdly. "You've been worried for nearly a year now. I've noticed it."

"Have I shown it so plainly?"

"Plainly enough for me to notice. Is it something to do with a woman? But of course it is—at your age only a woman could make you wear a solemn face."

"Yes. It's a woman. And I want you to help me, Snow

Lady, just as you used to long ago when I couldn't make things go right."

The slow tears clouded her eyes; yet my news seemed to make her happy. "When I was as old as you, Ruthie had been long enough with me to grow long curls." She smiled inscrutably.

From where we sat we could watch the house. While we had been talking, I had seen through the study-window how Ruthita stole to my father's chair. He looked up irritably at being disturbed. Her attitude was all meekness and apology as she explained her intrusion. He seemed to sigh at having to leave his work. She withdrew while he completed his sentence. He laid his pen carefully aside, glanced out into the garden shortsightedly, rose, and melted into the shadows at the back of his cave. The door at the top of the steps opened. He descended slowly and gravely, as though his brain was still tangled in the web of thought it had been weaving.

We sat together beneath the apple-tree while the light faded. Little ovals of gold, falling flaky through leaves on the turf, paled imperceptibly into the twilight grayness. My father's voice was worn and unsteady. It came over me that he had aged; up till now I had not noticed it. Beyond the wall in a neighboring garden children were playing; a woman called them to bed; a lawn-mower ran to and fro across the silence. He questioned me eagerly as to where I had been in Italy, punctuating my answers and descriptions with such remarks as, "I always wanted to go there—never had time—always felt that such a background would have made all the difference."

It was noticeable that Ruthita and the Snow Lady suppressed themselves in his presence; if they ventured anything, it was only to keep him interested or to lead his thoughts in happier directions. Presently he told them that they would be tired if they sat up later. Taking the hint as a command, they bade us good-night.

Darkness had gathered when they left us; to the southward London waved a torch against the clouds. We

watched the lights spring up in the bedrooms, and saw Ruthita and then the Snow Lady step to their windows and draw down their blinds. Presently the lights went out.

"Lord Halloway's been here again." When I waited for further explanation my father added, "Didn't like the fellow at first; he improves on acquaintance."

Then I spoke. "Depends how far you carry his acquaintance."

My father fidgeted in his chair. "He's got flaws in his character, but he's honest in keeping back nothing. Most people in our position wouldn't hesitate two minutes over such a match." Then, after a long pause, "And what's to become of Ruthita when I die?"

I took him up sharply. I was young enough to fear the mention of death. "You'll live for many years yet. After that, I'll take care of her if she doesn't marry."

My father sat upright. I wondered how I had hurt him. He spoke stiffly. "You'll inherit Sir Charles's money. When I married a first and a second time, I didn't consult his convenience, and the responsibilities I undertook are mine. Ruthita's only your sister by accident; already you've been too much together. We must consider this offer apart from sentiment. He's sowed his wild oats—well, he's sorry. And he'll be the Earl of Lovegrove by and by. To stand in her way would be selfishness."

His argument took me by surprise. "Is Ruthita anxious for it? What does she say?"

"She knows nothing of the world. She takes her coloring from you. She's afraid to speak out her mind. She thinks you would never forgive her."

His voice was high-strung and challenging.

"I don't believe it," I said quietly. "She doesn't love him—she'd be selling herself for safety."

In the interval that followed I could feel the grimness of his expression which the darkness hid from my eyes. "You're young; you don't understand. For years I've had to struggle to make ends meet. I'm about done—I'm tired. If Ruthita were settled, I could lie down with an easy mind.

There's enough saved to see me and her mother to our journey's end."

He rose to his feet suddenly. "You think I'm acting shabbily. Good-night."

He walked away, a gaunt shadow moving through the silver night. The awe I had of him kept me from following. I sat there and tried to puzzle out how this thing might be avoided. I could help financially; but my help would be refused because it was Sir Charles's money.

Next morning I woke at six and dressed. Dew was on the turf; it sparkled in the gossamer veils of spider-webs caught among the bushes. Blackbirds and thrushes in trees were calling. A cock crew, and a cock in the distance echoed. The childish thought came back to me—how much grown-ups miss of pleasure in their anxiety for the morrow. There is so much to be enjoyed for nothing!

A window-sash was raised sharply. Looking up I saw Ruthita in her white night-gown, with her hair tumbled like a cloud about her breast. I watched her, thinking her lovely—so timid and small and delicate. I called to her softly; she started and drew back. I waited. Soon she came down to me in the garden. I must have eyed her curiously.

"You've heard?"

She held out her hand pleadingly, afraid that I would judge her. "They're making me," she cried, "and I don't—don't want to, Dannie."

I led her away behind the tool-shed at the bottom of the garden; it was the place where I had discovered Hetty in her one flirtation.

"I'm not wanted," moaned Ruthita; "I cost money. So they're giving me to a man I don't love."

"They shan't," I told her, slipping my arm about her. "You shall come to me—I don't suppose I shall ever marry."

She nestled her head against my shoulder, saying, "You were always good to me; I don't know why. I'm not much use to anybody."

"Rubbish!" I retorted. "None of us could get along without you."

Then I told her that if the pressure became unbearable she must come to me. She promised.

The Snow Lady found us sitting there together; we made room for her beside us. Shortly after her coming Ruthita made an excuse to vanish.

I turned to the Snow Lady abruptly. "She's not going to marry Halloway."

She raised her brows, laughing with her eyes. "Why not? Why so positive?"

"Because it's an arranged marriage."

"Mine with her father was arranged; it was very happy."

Somehow I knew she was not serious.

"You don't want it?" I challenged.

"No, I don't want it; but Ruthita's growing older. No one else has asked for her. It would be a shame if she became an old maid."

"She won't."

"She won't, if you say so," said the Snow Lady.

During breakfast my father was silent. He seemed conscious of a conspiracy against him. When the meal was ended, he retired to his study, where he shut himself up, working morosely. I sought opportunities to tell the Snow Lady what I had come to say, but I could never find an opening to introduce the name of Vi. Whenever we were alone together she insisted on discussing Ruthita's future, stating and re-stating the reasons for and against the proposed match. The atmosphere was never sympathetic for the broaching of my own perplexities. Gradually I came to see that I must make my decision unaided; then I knew that I should decide in only one way. I engaged a passage to Boston provisionally, telling myself that it could be canceled. That I think was the turning-point, though I still pretended to hesitate.

The day before the boat sailed, my father announced at table, avoiding my eyes, that Lord Halloway had written

that he would call next day. I went to my bedroom and commenced to pack. Ruthita followed.

"You're going?"

"Yes."

"Because he's coming?"

"Partly."

Her eyes were blinded with tears; she sank against the wall in a fit of sobbing. "Oh, I wish you could take me—I wish you could take me!" she cried.

I comforted her, telling her to be brave, reminding her of her promise to come to me if they used pressure. She dabbed her eyes. "You and I've always stood together, little sister; you mustn't be afraid," I told her.

I carried my bags downstairs into the hall. The Snow Lady met me.

"What's this? You're going?" Her voice reflected dismay and bewilderment.

"Yes, going."

"But not for long! You'll be back shortly?"

"That depends."

I entered my father's study. He looked up from his writing. "I'm going away."

He held my hand in silence a moment; his throat was working; he would not look me in the eyes. "Won't you stay?" he asked hoarsely.

I shook my head.

"Good-by," he muttered. "Don't judge us harshly. Come back again."

Ruthita accompanied me to the end of the lane. She did not come further; she was grown up now and ashamed to be seen crying. At the last minute I wanted to tell her. I realized that she would understand—she was a woman. The knowledge came too late. She said she would write me at Oxford, and I did not correct her. I looked back as I went down the road and waved. I turned a corner; she was lost to sight.

Next day I sailed.

CHAPTER XIV

I GO TO SHEBA

A SLEEPY, contented little town, overshadowed by giant elms, sprawled out along the banks of a winding river, surrounded for miles by undulating woodlands—that is how I remember Sheba. The houses were for the most part of timber, and nearly all of them were painted white. They sat each in its unfenced garden, comfortably separate from neighbors, with a green lawn flowing from the roadway all about it, and a nosegay of salvias, hollyhocks, and lavender, making cheerfulness beside the piazza. I suppose unkind things happened there, but they have left no mark on my memory. When I think of Sheba there comes to me the sound of bees humming, woodpeckers tapping, frogs croaking, and the sight of blue indolent smoke curling above quiet gables, butterflies sailing over flowers, a nodding team of oxen on a sunlit road hauling fagots into town and, after sunset hour, the indigo silence of dusk beneath orchards where apples are dropping and fireflies blink with the eyes of goblins.

Sheba was one of those old New England towns from which the hurry of life has departed; it cared more for its traditions than for its future, and sat watching the present like a gray spectacled grandmother, pleased to be behind the times, with its worn hands folded.

I arrived there with only a small sum of money and the price of my return passage. I had limited my funds purposely, so that I might not be tempted to prolong my visit.

The day after my arrival my calculations were upset; I discovered that the Carpenter house was shut, and that Mr. and Mrs. Carpenter had not yet returned from the

coast. This made me careful. I was unwilling to draw on my bank in London lest my whereabouts should be discovered, which would necessitate awkward explanations to my family and the association of Vi's name with doubtful circumstances.

In my search for cheap lodgings I had a strange stroke of luck. Randall Carpenter's house stood in an old-world street, which at this time of the year was a tunnel through foliage. I waited until the gardeners had departed. Evening came; pushing open the gate, I entered the grounds.

I passed down a rough path under apple-trees, where fruit kept falling. In stables to the left, horses chafed in their stalls and snorted. To the right in the vegetable garden, birds of brilliant plumage flashed and darted, and fat gray squirrels sat up quivering to watch me. Overhead, near and far, the air vibrated with incessant twittering. The golden haze of sunset was over everything; the whole world seemed enkindled. The path descended to low, flat meadows where haymaking was in progress. Farm implements stood carelessly about, ready for the morrow. In one field the hay was cocked, in another gathered, in a third the cutting had commenced. I told myself I was with her, and shivered at the aching loneliness of reality.

Circling the meadows was a narrow stream, which at a little distance joined the main river; on the farther side stood scattered cottages, with gardens straggling down a hill to its banks. In one of these a gray-haired woman was working. She wore a sunbonnet and print-dress of lavender. In my idleness I threw myself down in the grass and observed her. She grew conscious that she was being watched, and cast sly glances across her shoulder. At first I thought she was suspicious of my trespassing; she came lower down the hill and nodded in shy friendly fashion.

"Good-evening," I called to her over the stream.

She drew herself erect and eyed me. "Guess you're a stranger?" she questioned, having found something foreign in my English accent.

I told her that I was, and then, for the sake of conversa-

tion, asked her if she knew of any rooms to rent. "Guess I do," she called back, "me and my sisters have one room to spare."

That was how I came to take lodgings with the three Misses Januaries. I paid them ten dollars weekly and had everything found. My room lay at the back; from my window I could see much of what went on in Randall Carpenter's grounds.

From the three Misses Januaries I learnt many things. They were decayed ladies and eked out a livelihood by bringing home piece-work to do for the jewelry factories. Every other day Miss Priscilla, the eldest, went to deliver the finished task and to take further orders. Miss Priscilla was proud, angular, and bent. Miss Julia was round and jolly, but crippled with rheumatism. Miss Lucy, the youngest, had a weak spine and was never dressed; day after day she lay between white sheets dreamily smiling, small as a child, making hardly any mound in the bed.

At first they hid from me the fact that they worked. Then they pretended that they did it to occupy their leisure. Sewing was so useless, Miss Priscilla said. At last they admitted the truth to the extent of letting me sit with them in Miss Lucy's bedroom, even allowing me to help them with the fastening of the interminable links that went to the making of one chain-bag.

It was during these meetings that they gossiped of their neighbors and themselves. By delicate manoeuvring I would lead the conversation round to Vi. I found that for them Sheba was the one and only town, and Randall Carpenter was its richest citizen. He stood behind all its thriving institutions. He was president of the Sheba National Bank. He had controlling interest in the jewelry factory. He owned the cotton-works. He had been Senator at Washington. Vi was the social leader and the mirror of local fashion. They spoke of her as though she embodied for them all that is meant by romance. They told me the story, which I had already heard, of how Randall Carpenter had saved her father from ruin.

While such matters were being discussed and fresh details added, Miss Lucy would smile up at the ceiling, with her thin arms stretched straight out and her fingers plucking at the coverlet. I discovered later that long years before, Randall Carpenter had kept company with her; then her spine trouble had commenced and their money had gone from them, and it had been ended. As a middle-aged bachelor he had married Vi, and now Miss Lucy re-lived her own girlhood in listening to stories of Vi's reported happiness.

Three weeks after my arrival in Sheba Vi returned. The evening before I had seen from my window that lights had sprung up in the house; early next morning I saw Dorrie in the garden, a white, diminutive, butterfly figure fluttering beneath the boughs. After breakfast I saw Vi come out, walking with a portly man. An eighth of a mile separated us—by listening intently I could hear her voice when she called, "Dorrie, Dorrie."

Twice I came near to her, though she did not know it. One Sunday morning I waited till service had commenced, and followed her to church. I slipped into a seat at the back. There were few people present. From where I sat I could get a clear view of her and her husband across empty pews. Mr. Carpenter was a squarely-built, kindly-looking man—unimaginative and mildly corpulent. His face was clean-shaven and ruddy. He had an air of benevolent prosperity; his hair was grizzled, the top of his head was bald and polished. When he offered me the plate in taking the collection, I noticed that his fingers were podgy. I remembered Vi's continually reiterated assertion that he was so kind to her. I knew what she had meant—kind, but lacking subtlety in expressing the affections. I judged that he was the sort of person to whom life had scattered largesse—he had never been tested, and consequently accepted all good fortune as something merited. His wide shrewd eyes had a steely gleam of justice; the puckered eye-lids promised humor. He was lovable rather than likable—a big boy, a mixture of naïve self-

complacency and masterfulness. Before the benediction was pronounced, I left.

This was the first time I had seen him at close quarters. I had come prepared to find faults in the man; I was surprised at my lack of anger. His comfortable amiability disarmed me.

The second time I came near to her was at nightfall. It was November. A touch of frost had nipped the leaves to blood-red; the Indian Summer had commenced. The air was pungent with the walnut fragrance of decaying foliage; violet mist trailed in shreds from thickets, like a woman's scarf torn from her throat in the passage. I had wandered out into the country. An aimless restlessness was on me—a sense of defiant self-dissatisfaction.

Occupied with my thoughts, I was strolling moodily along with hands in pockets, when I chanced to look up. She was coming down the road towards me. She was alone; her trim, clean-cut figure made a silhouette against the twilight. She was whistling like a boy as she approached; her skirt was short to the ankles; she carried a light cane in her hand. I wanted to stand still till she had come up with me and then to catch her in my arms before she was aware. For a moment I halted irresolute; then I turned into the woods to the left.

I could not understand how she could be so near to me and not know it. It seemed to me that I would raise clenched hands against the coffin-lid, were she to approach me, though I was buried deep underground.

As the year drew towards a close my uncertainty of mind became a torture. I knew that I ought to return to England; I was breaking the promise I had made to myself. My friends must be getting anxious. By this time Sir Charles must have heard of my disappearance. I was imperiling my future by stopping. Worse still, the longer I lived near Vi, the more difficult was I making it for myself to take up the threads of my old life without her. I continually set dates for my departure, and I continually postponed them. At last I booked my passage some way

ahead for the first week in January. In order to prevent myself from altering my decision, I told Miss Priscilla that I was going.

I fought a series of never finished battles with myself. As the time of my respite shortened, I grew frenzied. Was I to go away forever without speaking to her? Was I to give her no sign of my presence? Was I to let her think that I had forgotten her and had ceased to care? I kept myself awake of nights on purpose to make my respite go further; from where I lay on the pillow with my face turned to the snow-covered meadows, I could see the blur which was her house. Sometimes in the darkness, when one loses all standards, I determined to risk everything and go to her. With morning I mastered myself and saw clearly—to go to her would be basest selfishness.

In one of my long tramps I had come upon a pond in a secluded stretch of woodland on the outskirts of Sheba. On the last evening before my departure I remembered it. I was in almost hourly fear of myself—afraid that I would seek her out. I planned diversions of thought and action for my physical self, so that my will might keep it in subjection. This evening, when I was at a loss what to do, the inclination occurred to go there skating.

As I walked along the road, sleighs slid by with bells jingling. The merry golden windows of white houses in white fields brought a sense of peacefulness. The night was blue-black; the sky was starry; the air had that deceptive dryness which hides its coldness. Beneath the woods trees cast intricate sprawling tracteries of shadows. Every now and then the frozen silence was shattered by the snapping of some overladen bough; then the whole wood shook and shivered as though it were spun from glassy threads.

Picking my way through bushes, I came to the edge of the pond and sat down to adjust my skates. It was perhaps four hundred yards in extent and curved in the middle, so that one could not see from end to end. To the right grew a plantation of firs almost large enough for cutting;

on the other three sides lay tangled swamp and brush-wood.

I had risen to my feet and was on the point of striking out, when I heard a sound which was unmistakable, *rrh! rrh! rrh!*—the sharp ring of skates cutting against ice.

From a point above me at the edge of the fir-grove a figure darted out and vanished round the bend. The moon was just rising; behind bars of tall trunks I could see its pale disk shining—the pond had not yet caught its light.

I felt foolishly angry and disappointed that I was not to have my last evening to myself. I was jealous that some stranger, to whom it would lack the same intensity, should share this memory. Unreasonable chagrin held me hesitant; I was minded to steal away unnoticed.

The intruder had reached the far end of the pond—there was silence. Then the *rrh! rrh! rrh!* commenced again, coming back. I set out to meet it; it was eerie for two people to be within earshot, but out of sight in that still solitude. We swung round the corner together; the moon peered above the tree-tops. For an instant we were face to face, staring into one another's eyes; then our impetus carried us apart into the dusk.

I listened, and heard nothing but the brittle shuddering of icicles as boughs strained up to free themselves. Stealing back round the bend, I came upon her standing fixed and silent; as I approached her, she spread her hands before her eyes in a gesture of terror.

"Vi, Vi," I whispered, "it's Dante."

She muttered to herself in choking, babbling fashion.

When I had put my arms about her, she ceased to speak, but her body was shaken with sobbing. She made no sound, but a deep convulsive trembling ran through her. I talked to her soothingly, trying to convince her I was real. Slowly she relaxed against me sighing, and trusted herself to look up at me, letting her fingers wander over my face and hands. I had brought her the bitterness of remembrance. Stooping, I kissed her mouth. "Just once," I pleaded, "after all these months of loneliness. I'm going to-morrow."

"You must," she said, freeing herself from my embrace and clasping her arms about my neck; "oh, it's wrong, but I've wanted you so badly."

I led her to the edge of the pond and removed her skates. The moon had now sailed above the spear-topped firs and the ice was a silver mirror. Walking through the muffled woods I told her of my coming to Sheba, of the window from which I had watched her, and of all that had happened. From her I learnt that she also had been going through the same struggle between duty and desire ever since we parted.

"Sometimes I felt that it was no use," she said; "I couldn't fight any longer—I must write or come to you. Then something would happen; I would read or hear of a woman who had done it, and in the revulsion I felt I realized how other people would feel about myself. And I saw how it would spoil Randall's life, and especially what it would mean to Dorrie. You can't tell your personal excuses to the world; it just judges you wholesale by what you do, and I couldn't bear that. It's so easy to slip into temptation, Dante, especially our kind of temptation; because we love one another, anything we might do seems good. You can only see what sin really is when you picture it in the lives of others."

We were walking apart now; she had withdrawn her arm from mine. "I shall always love you," I said.

"And I you."

"I shall never marry any other woman," I told her; "I shall wait for you."

"Poor boy," she murmured, "it isn't even right for you to think of that."

Then, because there were things we dared not mention, we fell to talking about Dorrie, how she was growing, how she was losing her lisp, and all the tender little coaxing ways she had of making people happy.

We came out of the woods on the road which led back to Sheba. The lights twinkling ahead and the occasional

travelers passing, robbed us of the danger of being alone together. I think she had been waiting for that.

"Dante," she said, smiling at me bravely, "there is only one thing for you to do—you must marry."

"Marry," I exclaimed, "some woman whom I don't love!"

"Not that," she said; "but many men learn to love a second woman. I've often thought you should be happy with Ruthita; you love her already. After you had had children, you'd soon forget me. You'd be able to smile about it. Then it would be easier for me to forget."

My answer was a tortured whisper. "It's impossible; I'm not made like that. For my own peace of mind I almost wish I were."

We came to the gate of her house. Across the snow, beneath the gloom of elms lighted windows smote the darkness with bars of gold. Within one of the rooms a man was stirring; he came to the panes and looked out, watching for her return.

"He's always like that; he can't bear to be without me. I had one of my moods this evening, when I want to be alone—he knew it."

"When you wanted to think of me; that's what you meant—why didn't you say it?"

"One daren't say these things, when they're saying good-by, perhaps for ever."

She had her hand on the gate, preparing to enter; we neither of us knew what to say at parting. The things that were in my heart I must not utter, and all other things seemed trivial. I looked from her to the burly figure framed in the glowing window. I pitied him with the proud pity of youth for age, a pity which is half cruel. After all, she loved me and we had our years before us. We could afford disappointment, we whose lives were mostly in the future; his life was two-thirds spent, and his years were running out.

Looking up the path in his direction, I asked, "Shall you tell him?"

"He has known for a year; it was only fair."

"And he was angry? He blamed you?"

"He was sorry. I wish he had blamed me. He blames himself, which is the hardest thing I have to bear."

"Vi," I said, "he's a good man—better than I am. You must learn to love him."

She held out her hand quickly; her voice was muffled. "Good-night, my dearest, and good-by."

The gate clanged. As she ran up the path, I saw that her husband had moved from the window. He opened the door to her; in the lighted room I saw him put his arms about her. By the way she looked up at him and he bent over her, I knew she was confessing.

Then I shambled down the road, feeling very old and tired. I was so tired that I hardly knew how to finish my packing; I was cold, bitterly cold. I dragged myself to bed; in order to catch the boat in Boston, I had to make an early start next morning. My teeth were chattering and my flesh was burning. Several times in the night I caught myself speaking aloud, saying stupid, tangled things about Vi. Then I thought that what I had said had been overheard. I shouted angrily to them to go away, declaring that I had not meant what I said.

When my eyes closed, the stars were going out. "It will soon be morning," I told myself; "I must get up and dress."

I tried to get up, but my head would stick to the pillow and my body refused to work. "That's queer," I thought; "never mind, I'll try later."

CHAPTER XV

THE FLAME OF A SWORD

ONE morning, it seemed the one on which I had planned to sail, I awoke in a strange room. I knew it was strange because the sun was pouring in across the bed, and the sun never looked through my window at the Misses Januaries' till late in the afternoon. Something wet was on my forehead—a kind of bandage that came down low across my eyes almost preventing me from seeing anything. This set me wondering in a slow, thick-witted manner.

I did not much care how I came to be there—I felt effortless and contented; yet, in a lazy way, my mind became interested. I lay still, piecing together little scraps of happenings as I remembered them. The last thing I could recall that was rational was my attempting to get out of bed. Then came vague haunting shapes, too sweet and too horrible for reality—things which refused to be embodied and remained mere atmospheres in the brain, terrors and delights of sleep which slowly faded as the mind cleared itself.

I pulled my hand from under the sheets and was surprised at the effort it took to raise it to my forehead. I heard the rustle of a starched skirt: it was the kind of sound that Hetty used to make in my childhood, when she came to dress me in the mornings and I pretended that I still slept. I used to think in those days that it was a stern clean sound which threatened me with soap and chilly water. Someone was bending over me; a cool voice said, "Don't move, Mr. Cardover. I'll do that."

The bandage was pushed back and in the sudden rush of light I saw a young woman in a blue print-dress, stand-

ing beside my pillow. I tried to speak to her, but my mouth was parched and my voice did not make the proper sound.

"Don't try to speak," she said; "you've been sick, you know. Soon you'll feel better."

I stopped trying to talk and obeyed her, just as I used to obey Hetty. At the back of my mind I smiled to myself that I, a grown man, should obey her; she looked such a girl. After she had put water to my lips and passed a damp cloth over my face and hands, she nodded pleasantly and went back to her seat by the window.

No—until now I had never seen this room. The walls were covered in cherry-colored satin, which was patterned in vertical stripes, with bunches of flowers woven in between the lines. All the wood-work was painted a gleaming white. Chippendale chairs and old-fashioned delicate bits of furniture stood about in odd corners. Between the posts of the big Colonial bed I could see a broad bay-window, with a seat going round it. Across the panes leafless boughs cast a net-work of shadows, and through them fell a bar of solid sunlight in which dust-motes were dancing by the thousand. Half-way down each side of the bed screens were standing, so that I could only see straight before me and a part of the room to the left and right beyond where they ended.

Through weakness I was powerless to speak or stir, yet my swimming senses were anxiously alert. I saw objects without their perspective, as though I were gazing up through water. In the same way with sounds, I heard them thunderously and waited in suspense for their repetition. Though I lay so still, nothing missed my attention.

By the quietness of the house I gathered that the hour was yet early. Far away cocks crew their rural challenge. On a road near by footsteps passed in a hurry. The whistle of a factory sounded; then I knew they had been footsteps of people going to work. Beneath the window a garden-roller clanged across gravel, and became muffled as it reached the turf. A door banged remotely; a few

seconds later someone tapped on the door of my bedroom. The nurse laid aside her knitting and rustled over to the threshold. A question was asked in a low whisper and the nurse's voice answered.

A woman entered into the bar of sunlight and stood regarding me from the foot of the bed. With the immense indifference of weakness I gazed back. Her long, fine-spun hair hung loose about her shoulders like a mantle. She wore a blue dressing-gown, which she held together with one hand across her breast. Her eyes were still sleepy; she had come directly she had wakened to inquire after me. She smiled at me, nodding her head. She seemed very distant; I wanted to return her smile, but I had not the energy. I closed my eyes; when I looked again she had vanished.

For the next few days I do not know how many people came and looked at me, whispered a few words and went. There was the old gray-haired doctor, with his military-bearing and his trick of pursing his lips and knitting his brows as he took my temperature. I had one visitor who was regular—Randall Carpenter. He looked years older. Tiptoeing into the room, he would seat himself in the bay-window; from there he would gaze at me moodily without a word, with his knees spread apart, and his podgy hands clasped together. Sometimes I would doze while he watched me and would awake to find him still there, his position unaltered. One thing I noticed; Vi and he were never in my room together.

In these first days, which slipped by uncounted, I realized that I had been very near to death. It seemed to me that my spirit still hovered on the borderland and looked back across the boundary half-regretful. I had the feeling that life was a thing apart from me—something which I was unanxious to share. All these people came and went, but I could not respond to them. I desired only to be undisturbed.

Several times I had heard the shrill piping voice of Dorrie and the long low *hush* of someone warning her to

speak less loudly. She would come to the door many times in the day, inquiring impatiently whether I were better. Sometimes she would leave flowers, which the nurse would put in water and set down by the side of my bed. I would watch them dreamily, saying to myself, "Dorrie's flowers."

One afternoon I heard her voice at the door, asking "Nurth, how ith Dante?" The nurse had left the room for a moment, so no one answered her question. I heard the door pushed wider, and stealthy feet slipping across the carpet. Round the edge of the screen came the excited face and little shining head. I held out my hand to her and tried to speak. Then I tried again and whispered, "Dorrie! Dorrie darling!"

She took my hand in both her small ones, trying to mask the fear which my changed appearance caused her. "Dear Dante," she whispered, "I'm tho thorry."

"Kiss me, Dorrie," I said.

"Dear Dante, you'll get better, won't you? For my thake, Dante! Then we'll play together, like we uthed to." Tears trickled down her flushed cheeks as she questioned.

As her soft lips brushed me and her silky curls fell about my forehead, I felt for the first time that my grip on life was coming back. Lying there thinking things over confusedly, it had seemed hardly worth while trying to get better. It seemed worth while, now that I was reminded that there was such beautiful innocence as Dorrie's in the world.

When the nurse came back a few moments later, she shook her head at Dorrie reproachfully and tried to take her away from me.

"But he wanths me," cried Dorrie in self-defense, and I kept fast hold of her.

After that I began to gather strength. I noticed that as I threw off my lethargy, Vi's visits grew less frequent. When she came her manner was restrained; she entered hurriedly and made it appear that her only reason for coming was to confer with the nurse. At first I would follow her about with my eyes; but when I found how much it

embarrassed her, I pretended to be dozing when I heard her enter.

I could not understand how I came to be in Randall Carpenter's house. I dared not ask Vi or her husband; my presence implied too much already. I was afraid to ask the nurse; I did not know how much I should be telling by my question. There seemed to be a polite conspiracy of silence against me. I wondered where it would all end.

I had grown to like the old doctor. He was a shrewd, wise, serious man. He never spoke a word of religion, yet he made his religion felt by his kindness. As he went about his work, he would become chatty, trying to rouse my interest. He spoke a good deal about himself and told me anecdotes of scenes which he had lived through in the War, when he had been a surgeon in the Northern army. Out of his old tired eyes he would watch me narrowly; I began to feel that he understood.

One day I whispered to him to send away the nurse. He invented an errand for her, saying that he would stay with me till she returned. When she had gone, he closed the door carefully and came and sat down on the side of the bed. "Now, what is it, my boy?"

"What happened, doctor?"

He pursed his lips judicially and looked away from me for a full minute, as though he would escape answering; then his eyes came back and I saw that he was going to tell.

"I reckoned you'd be asking that question," he said. "The morning that you figured to sail, you were taken sick at the Misses Januaries'. You were mighty bad when they sent for me; you had pneumonia and a touch of brain-fever. It's a close call you've had. I found you wandering in your head—and saying things."

"Things, doctor? Things that I wouldn't want heard?"

He nodded gravely. "No one in Sheba knew anything about you. I saw that you were in for a long spell, and that the Misses Januaries' was no place for you to get proper nursing."

He halted awkwardly. "Then I came to Randall and told him."

"Had I mentioned him in my delirium?"

"You'd mentioned her."

I could feel the warm flush of color spreading through my body and turned away my head. The old doctor gripped my hand. "That's how it happened, I guess."

Little by little he told me about Randall Carpenter. During the first days of crisis he had scarcely gone to bed, but had paced the house, always returning to my bedroom door to see if he could be of any service.

"But, why should he care?" I questioned.

"Because she cared, I guess. He's so fond of her that he wants to do more than ever she could ask him. And then, Randall's a mighty just man, and he's always most just when he's most tempted."

He looked down at me sidelong and silence fell between us. It was broken by the footfall of the nurse along the passage. I asked him quickly when I should be well enough to be moved.

"You're some better now, but we mustn't think of moving you yet, though, of course, you must go at the earliest."

Towards midnight the nurse took my temperature. I saw that she was surprised, for she took it a second time. "Have you any pain?" she asked me.

Randall Carpenter came in and they went away together. I lay staring up at the ceiling, my hands clenched and my eyes burning. They all knew; I alone was ignorant of what things I had said.

A carriage came bowling up the driveway. I recognized whose it was, for I had become familiar with the horse's step. The doctor came into the room; as he bent over me our eyes met. I clutched his arm and he stooped lower. "Stay and talk with me," I whispered. "You all look at me and none of you will tell me. I can't bear it—can't bear it any longer."

"What can't you bear?"

"Not knowing."

When he had told them that there was no change for the worse and had sent them back to bed, he came and sat down beside me. The lights in the room were extinguished, save for a reading lamp in a far corner where the nurse had been sitting.

"I guess something's troubling you. Take your time and tell me slowly. I'll sure help you, if I can."

"Doctor, you know about me and Mrs. Carpenter?"

"I reckon you're sort of fond of her—is that it?"

I buried my face against the cool pillow. I dared not look at him, but he signaled me courage with the pressure of his hand.

"More than fond, that's why I came to Sheba. I didn't mean to let her know that I'd ever been here; that last evening we met by accident. I was a fool to have come. I've been unfair to her—unfair to everybody."

He did not answer me; he could not deny my assertion.

"You remember what you said this afternoon—that I let things out in my delirium. I want to know what they were. I've been trying to remember; but it all comes wild and confused. Tell me, did I say anything that would make her ashamed of me—anything that would make her hate me?"

He shook his head. "Nothing that would make her hate you. Perhaps, that's the worst of it."

"Well then, anything that would damage her reputation? Was I brought here only to prevent strangers from listening to what I said, just as you'd shut a mad dog up for safety?"

In my feverish suspense, I gained sudden strength and raised myself up on my elbow to face him. He patted me gently on the shoulder, saying, "Lie down; it's a sick man's fancy. You're guessing wide of the mark—it was nothing such as that." He tucked me up and smoothed out the sheets.

"Now stay still and I'll tell you. You were calling for her when I came to you. At first we didn't know what you meant; then you mentioned Dorrie. Only Miss Priscilla

and I heard what you were saying; you can trust Miss Priscilla not to speak about it. I let Randall know and he brought his wife over with him. Directly she touched you, you grew quiet. It was Randall suggested you being brought here; he was sorry for you and it was kindness made him do it. All through your illness till you came to yourself, Mrs. Carpenter sat by you; whenever she left you, you grew restless. She and her husband saved your life, I guess."

"But what makes them all so strange to me now?"

He fidgeted and cleared his throat. "It's the truth I'm wanting," I urged.

"Randall saw what she meant to you."

"Anything else?"

"And what you meant to her."

Against my will a wave of joy throbbed through me. I felt like sobbing from relief and happiness. Then a clear vision of the reality came to me—the great silent man who stared at me for hours, and the high-spirited woman, so suddenly grown timid, stealing in and out the room with averted eyes in pallid meekness.

"What ought I to do?" My voice choked me as I asked it.

He turned his wise, care-wrinkled face towards me gravely. "I'm wondering," he said. "There's only one thing to do—ask God about it. You did wrong in coming—there's no disguising that. But the good God's spared you. He knows what He means you to do. I'm an old fellow, and I've seen a heap of suffering and trouble. I've seen men die on the battlefield, and I've seen 'em go under when it was least expected. I don't know how I'd have come through, if I hadn't believed God knew what He was doing. I guess if He'd been lazy, like me and you, He'd just have let you slip out, 'cause it seemed easiest. But He hasn't, and He knows why He hasn't. I'd just leave it in His hands."

Long after he had ceased to speak, I lay thinking of his words—thinking how simple life would be if God were

exactly like this old man. Then I began to hope that He might be—a kind of doctor of sick souls, who would get up out of bed and come driving through the night without complaining, just to bring quiet to sinful people like myself. I closed my eyes, trying to think that God sat beside me. Some time must have elapsed, but when I looked round the doctor was still there. His head was bowed forward from his bent shoulders, nodding.

"You're tired. I can sleep now."

He awoke with a jerk. His last words to me before he left were, "Just leave it in His hands."

From then on there was a changed atmosphere in the house. We had all been afraid of one another and of one another's misunderstandings.

When Dorrie had gone to bed, Vi would sit within the circle of the lamp and read to me while I lay back on my pillows in the shadows, watching how the gold light broke about her face and hands. She was always doing something, either reading or sewing, as though when we were alone she were afraid to trust herself.

One evening she said to me, "You haven't asked if there are any letters."

"I wasn't expecting any."

"Weren't expecting any! Why not?"

"Because none of my friends know that I've come to Sheba."

She drew her face back from the lamp; her sewing fell from her hands. My words had reminded us both of the guilty situation which lay unchanged behind our present attitude.

It was she who broke the silence. "When you were taken ill I wrote Ruthita and told her—and told her that you were being nursed in our house."

She brought me my letters and then made an excuse to leave me to myself. My father had written; so had the Snow Lady. After expressing concern for my health, the tone of their letters became constrained and unnatural; they refrained from accusing me, but they had guessed. Ruth-

ita's was an awkward, shamefaced little note—it puzzled me by omitting to say anything of Halloway.

More and more after this Vi showed fear of being left alone with me; any moment a slip of the tongue might betray our passion. Frequently during the evening hours Mr. Carpenter would join us. He would steal into the room while Vi was reading and sit down by my bedside. I began to have great sympathy for the man. Vi's actions to him were those of a daughter, and he, when he addressed her, called her "My child." Both their attitudes to one another were wrong—it hurt me to watch them; they made such efforts to create the impression that everything was well. Sitting beside me while she read, he would fasten his eyes on her. If she smiled across at him in turning a page, his heavy face would flood with a quite disproportionate joy. He was too fine a man for the part he was playing; he had strength of character and mastery over men.

Along his own lines he had a wonderful mind. It was always scheming for efficiency, concentration, and bigger projects. If money was the reward of his energy, the desire for power impelled him. But I could quite understand how a woman might yearn for more human interests and more subtle methods of conveying affection than the mere piling of luxury on luxury. He could articulate his deepest emotions only in acts.

One evening when Vi had excused herself on the ground that she had a headache, I took the opportunity to thank him for his kindness. He became as confused as if I had discovered him in a lie.

"My dear boy, you mustn't speak to me like that; you don't owe me anything. It is I who owe you everything."

I was staggered by his disclaimer. Under existing circumstances it seemed a superlative extravagance of language. Then he explained, "If it hadn't been for you, we shouldn't have Vi."

It was the first reference that any of us had made to what had happened at Ransby.

After that Randall Carpenter and I grew to be friends. We didn't do much talking about it, but we each realized how the other felt. . . .

I was almost sufficiently recovered to travel. I broached the subject of my leaving several times—the first time at breakfast. Randall glanced up sharply from the letter he was opening—his expression clouded—instead of looking at me he stared at Vi. "Certainly not. Certainly not," he blustered. "Couldn't hear of it."

Dorrie added her piping protest. Vi alone was silent. Every time I approached the subject it was the same. The truth was our relations were so delicately balanced that the slightest disturbance would precipitate a crisis—and the crisis we dreaded. We each one knew that the time for frank speaking could scarcely be avoided, but we were eager to postpone it. So we procrastinated, lengthening out our respite.

One afternoon I returned with Randall from a drive to find Vi waiting for us at the gate. Her face was drawn with anxiety.

"What's happened?" asked Randall, and the sharpness of suspense was in his voice.

Vi handed me a cable. It was my recall—we all knew that. I ripped the envelope in haste; what I read, strange to say, caused me no elation—only the bitterness of finality. I raised my eyes; they were both staring at me. "My grandfather's dead. His will's in my favor. I must return to England immediately."

They received the news as though a blow had fallen. Vi crept in and out the rooms with a masked expression of unspoken tragedy. Dorrie caused frequent embarrassment by her coaxing attempts to make me promise to visit them again. Nevertheless, when she had gone to bed and we no longer had her to distract us, we would pass more painful hours in inventing small talk to tide us over dangerous topics.

The night before I sailed, we kept Dorrie up till she fell asleep against me. Her innocence was a barrier between

us. When she had been carried to bed, Vi sat down to the piano and sang, while we two men glowered desperately before the fire. I dared not watch her; I could not bear the pain that was in her eyes. As I listened, I knew that her chief difficulty in selections was what to avoid. We were in a mood to read into everything a sentimental interpretation.

There were long pauses between her playing, during which no one spoke and the only sound to be heard was the falling of ashes in the grate. The way in which we were grouped seemed symbolic—she at the piano apart from us, while we were side by side; by loving her, we had pushed her out of both our lives. Randall turned querulously in his chair, "Why don't you go on playing, my child?"

Several times she half-commenced an air and broke off. Her voice was a blind thing, tottering down an endless passage. For a horrid minute there was dead silence—quivering suspense; then the keys crashed discordantly as she gave way to a storm of weeping.

She rose with an appealing gesture, and slipped out. We heard her footsteps trailing up the stairs, her door close, and then stillness.

I shuddered as though a window had been flung open behind me and a cold wind blew across my back. The man at my side huddled down into his chair; his fleshy face had lost its firmness; his eyes, like a statue's, seemed without pupils. The moment which we had dreaded and postponed had arrived.

Randall followed her into the hall; he came back, shutting the door carefully behind him. There was slow decision in his voice when he said, "After all, we've got to speak about it."

He sank down, his cheeks blotchy and his hands quivering as with palsy. When he spoke, he tried to make his voice steady and matter-of-fact. It was as though he were saying, "We've got to be commonsense, we men of the world. We knew this would happen. There's nothing to be gained by losing our nerves."

This is what he actually said, "It isn't her fault. You and I are to blame."

"Not you," I protested. "It's I who've behaved abominably."

He shifted in his chair; struck a match; raised it part way to his cigar and let it flicker out. Without looking at me he answered, "We shan't gain anything by quarreling over who's to blame. We've got her into a mess between us—it's up to us to get her out."

"But you didn't——"

He flung out his arm in irritation. "Don't waste words. I married her when she was too young to know what marriage meant; I loved her and supposed that nothing else mattered. That's my share. You made love to my wife and followed her to Sheba. That's yours. We've got her into a mess between us, and we've got to get her out."

He waited for me to make a suggestion; I was too much taken aback. We couldn't get her out; we could only help her to endure it. We both knew that—so why discuss it?

Turning his head and staring hard at me, he continued, "There's only one thing to be considered—*her happiness*."

"Perhaps she'll forget when I'm gone," I ventured.

"She won't and you know it."

He barked the words. His manner was losing its air of tired patience.

"See here, Cardover, you and I have got to get down to facts. We don't help one another by fooling ourselves. You went out of her life for a year; she didn't forget. It's different now; you've been with her in this house and everything will remind her of you. What are we going to do about it?"

He repeated his question harshly, as though demanding an instant answer. What could I tell him?

He broke the miserable silence. "Ever since you talked of leaving, I've been studying this thing out. I knew we'd have to face it, and yet somehow I hoped—— Never

mind what I hoped. So you've nothing to say? You can't guess what I'm driving at?"

I shook my head.

His face became haggard and stern; only the twitching of the eye-lids betrayed his nervousness.

"I'd give anything to see Vi happy. So would you— isn't that correct?" He darted a challenging look in my direction. "I'd give all I possess, I say, factories, banks, good name, popularity. She's more to me than anything in the world." Then reluctantly forcing himself to speak the words, "There's only one way out—only one way to make her happy."

He leant forward, clutching my knee. "You must have her."

I drew back from him amazed, startled out of my self-possession. There was something so horribly commonsense about his offer; I could not take him seriously for the moment. He was tempting me, perhaps, in order that he might find out just how far Vi and I had gone together—he might easily suspect that things had happened during that summer at Ransby which had not been confessed.

Now as I met his cold gray eyes, I felt his power. His face was inscrutable and set, his mouth relentless. I had often wondered as I had watched him in his home-life what stern qualities his amiability disguised—qualities which would account for his business success. I knew now: here was a man who could state facts in their nudity and strip problems of their sentiment—a man who could lay aside feeling and act with the cruelty of logic.

"You must have her," he repeated.

"Randall," I broke out hoarsely, "you don't mean that."

"I do mean it."

"She wouldn't allow it."

"She'd have to if I forced her; when I'd forced her, she'd be glad."

"But it's impossible. It isn't honorable."

"Honorable! If we'd been honorable, you and I, this wouldn't have happened."

"But think what people would say?"

"What people would say doesn't matter. There are some things which go so deep that they concern only ourselves."

"But Vi—before ever we decide anything, it would be honest to consult her."

"You had her decision to-night." He spoke bitterly, with settled finality. "You see it's this way: I've tried to make her happy; because of you I never shall. She wants you; she's a right to have you."

The fire had all but gone out; the room had grown chilly. We sat without talking, thinking of her, reviewing the brutal cruelties of life. I had reached the logical goal of my desire—the impossible had happened.

I let my fancy run a little way ahead, picturing the first freshness of the days that were coming. Far away, with faery sounds, bugles of the future were blowing. I was recalled to the ominous present by the frozen hopelessness of this just man. We were placing society at defiance; we were settling our problem on grounds of individual expediency. Would we have strength to be happy in spite of condemnation? Would our conception of what was just to Vi prove just in the end?

I began to waver. I thought I saw what had happened to Randall—the tension of the last weeks had wrought upon his nerves. He had brooded over the situation till remorse for his own share in it had made him lose his regard for social standards. There was a tinge of insanity about this quixotic determination to sacrifice himself.

I went over to the fireplace and pulled the smoldering logs together, so that they broke into a feeble flame. I did it leisurely to gain time. With my back towards him I inquired, "Have you reckoned the cost of all this?"

"Probably."

"But the cost to yourself?"

"As far as I can."

"You can't have. You wouldn't propose it if you had. You know what'll be said."

"What'll be said?"

"That you wanted to get rid of her and that that was why you took me into your house."

"Leave me out of it. If love means anything, it means sacrifice. I love her; you've come between us. My love's injuring her now, and I'm not going to see you spoil her life by going away without her."

"But she'll spoil her life if she goes with me. People——"

"People! Well, what'll they say about her?"

"Everything defiling that hasn't occurred."

"And *you* think that we ought to keep her miserable just because of that—out of fear of tittle-tattle? If she stays with me she'll be wretched; I shall have to watch myself torturing her—paining her even with my affection. If she goes with you——"

"If she goes with me she'll become a social outcast. She couldn't bear that; she'd sink under it. No, Randall, we can't decide this matter as if it concerned only ourselves. It doesn't. There are all kinds of things involved in it. I've been your guest, and you've become my friend. We'd look low-down in other people's eyes. You want her to be happy—none of us could ever be that if we did what you suggest. Don't you see that you'd be the only one who was playing a decent part? Vi's part and mine would be contemptible. We'd appear treacherous even to ourselves. As for other people——! You take me into your house when I'm sick, and I run off with your wife! It can't be done, Randall."

"But that's not what I'm proposing," he said quietly; "I don't want you to run away together."

"What then?"

"I'll arrange that she shall divorce me. I've consulted lawyers. According to the laws of Massachusetts an absolute divorce, which would permit you to marry her within a reasonable time, is only granted on one ground. I'll provide her with fictitious evidence. She can bring the case against me and I'll let it go uncontested. She can

win her freedom respectably without your name being mentioned."

My position was elaborately false. I wanted her with every atom of my body, and here was I contending that I would not have her. At Ransby I had been willing to steal her, and now she was offered me; but I had not seen how much she meant to Randall then—at that time he was a hostile figure in my imagination.

His unselfishness filled me with shame that I had ever thought to wrong him. And yet the thing which he proposed was the inevitable consequence of our actions; his cold reasoning had discerned that. If facts were as he had stated them, what other way was there out?

"You agree, then?"

"I don't. You'd save our faces for us, but what d'you suppose we'd think of ourselves? The thing's not decent. People don't do things like that. Men can run off with other men's wives and still respect themselves; if they did what you suggest—take the husband's happiness and his good name as well—they'd know what to call themselves, though no one else suspected."

"What's that?"

"Blackguards."

"So in your opinion it's worse to take a wife with her husband's consent than to steal her? Humph!"

He leant across the table for a cigar. With great deliberation he cut the end. When it was well alight, he thrust his thumbs into his waistcoat pockets, looking me up and down. When he spoke, he left gaps between his words. There was the rumble of suppressed anger in what he said.

"I thought you were a strong man, Cardover, or I shouldn't have spoken to you the way I have. You fell in love with my wife without knowing she was married; I don't blame you for that. But after you knew, you followed her—followed her to her home-town. You've made an impossible situation. You can't leave it at that; you've got to help out, and, by God, you shall. I've got to lose her

and stand the disgrace of it. You've got to lose your self-respect. What d'you think life is, anyhow? If you gamble, you incur debts. We're going to play this game to a finish. You talk of decency and honor; you should have thought of them earlier. You came here to rob me of my wife; well, now I'm going to give her to you because she can't do without you. And now, out of consideration for me, you want to crawl out at the last minute. Your crawling out may save appearances, but it don't alter facts. You're something worse than a blackguard—a quitter."

He drew in his breath as if he were about to strike; then he flung out his fist, shaking it at me. "Don't you want her?"

"You know I want her."

"Then what's the matter? Are you afraid of the price?"

"The price she'd have to pay and you'd have to pay—yes."

He frowned. His face was puckered with suspicion. "Isn't it that you're afraid for yourself?"

The heat of his anger scorched me. I had watched this interpretation of my conduct taking shape under my repeated refusals.

"I've been accused of counting the cost before to-day," I said. "I'm not counting the cost now. I'm thinking of Vi with her clean standards and her sense of duty. If she were the woman to consent to what you're proposing, I wouldn't want to marry her and you wouldn't be willing to sacrifice yourself for her. But she won't consent, and I won't consent."

Lurching heavily to his feet, he stood over me threateningly. "Don't you know I can force you? If I divorced her you'd have to marry her."

"But you won't."

"But I would if I thought it was only for my sake you were refusing."

"It's only partly for your sake."

"Why, then?"

"I've shared your hospitality."

"And because of that you won't take her?"

"No."

"Then I'll make you——For the last time, will you take her?"

"Not on those terms."

Our voices had risen. A silence followed. Behind us we heard a sound. The temperature of the room seemed lowered, as though something we had killed had entered.

Turning, we saw Vi standing in the doorway. Her hair fell loose about her shoulders. She was thinly clad and had risen hastily from bed. Our quarrel must have reached her through the silent house. Her face was pinched and pitiful. As she watched us her eyes searched Randall's in terror and her hands plucked at her breasts.

How much had she heard? How long had she been standing there? Did she know how we had been degrading her? What had she gathered from my last words? She had found us haggling over her as though she were a chattel, each one trying to force the other to accept her, neither showing any sign that he desired her for himself. In the chilly room we shivered, hanging our heads.

Slowly she crossed the room. Her eyes were fixed on Randall; for all the attention she paid me, I might not have been there.

"You didn't mean it. You can't have meant it."

He lifted his head weakly, in one last effort to be firm.

"But I did, Vi. It's for your sake—for your happiness."

She flung her arms about him, holding him to her though he tried to draw back.

"But you forgot——"

"I forgot nothing."

"You did—there's Dorrie."

She buried her head on his shoulder, sobbing her heart out. He eyed me sullenly. He looked an old man. Awkwardly, with a gesture that was afraid of its tenderness, he let his hand wander across her hair. She raised

her face to his, clinging against him, and kissed him on the mouth.

They traversed the room, going from me; their footsteps died out upon the stairs.

Never once had she looked at me.

In the grayness of the morning, before the servants had begun to stir, I packed my bag and left.



BOOK IV
THE FRUIT OF THE GARDEN

*Thou hast been in Eden. Thou shalt
eat the fruit of thy doings, yea, even
the fruit of thy thoughts.*

CHAPTER I

THE HOME-COMING

LEAVING the hansom at the foot of Pope Lane and carrying my bags, I walked up the avenue of limes. The wantonness of spring was in the air and its melancholy. Above the high walls the golden hurry of the sunset quivered. A breeze tore past me down the passage, twisting and turning like a madcap ballet-dancer. Overhead in the young greenness of the trees a host of sparrows fluttered, impudently publishing their love-making.

At Plymouth on landing I had been met by letters from my lawyers and from Uncle Obad. They were addressed to Sir Dante Cardover. It was rather pleasant to be addressed as Sir Dante; until then I had not realized my luck. The memory of that last night at Sheba had numbed my faculties and taken my future from me. But now, with the thought of Woadley, life began to weave itself into a new pattern.

On the run up to London, as the quiet of English landscapes and the greenness of English meadows drifted by, I lost my bitter sense of isolation: I belonged to this; it was part of me. At the same time, the impassive wholesomeness of English faces awoke me in a strange way to the enormity of what I had done. It was odd how far I had wandered from old traditions and old landmarks in the delirium of the past two years. Even I was a little scandalized by some of my recollections.

Next day I purposed to go down to Woadley; to-night I would spend with my father at Pope Lane. There were explanations to be made; explanations where my father was concerned, were never comfortable. I walked.

with a pebble in my shoe till I had got them over. I had sure proof that he was annoyed, for none of my letters, written to him since my recovery, had been answered.

Thrusting my hand into the creeper, I found the knob. Far away at the back of the house the bell tinkled; after an interval footsteps shuffled down the path. The door opened cautiously; in the slit it made I saw the face of Hetty. There was something in its expression that warned me.

"Father at home?" I asked cheerfully, pushing forward.

"Master Dante, or Sir Dante as I should say, don't you go for to see 'im."

"Why not?"

"'E's bitter against you."

"What nonsense! Here, take one of these bags. Why should he be bitter against me?"

She crumpled her apron nervously. "'Cause of 'er—the woman in Ameriky. I don't know the rights of it, but 'e's 'ardly spoke your name since."

"But I've come to see him. I've only just landed."

She stared at me gloomily, barring the entrance. Across her shoulder I could see the path winding round the house and down to the garden where everything was familiar. Once I had longed to leave it! How much I would now give to get back! The leaves shivered, making patches of sunlight move like gold checkers, pushed forward and backward on the lawn. My mind keenly visualized all the details that lay out of sight. I knew just how my father must look sitting writing at his study-window. I ought to have told him; he might have understood. But the barrier of reticence had always divided us.

"If I was you, Sir Dante, I'd go away and write 'im. I'll see that 'e reads it this time. Yes I will, if I loses my plaice."

"*This time?*"

Her cheeks went crimson. "'E didn't read the letters you sent after 'ers. 'E tossed 'em aside."

"But the Snow Lady and Ruthie, they'll see me."

She looked furtively over her shoulder at the house, then she slipped out into the lane beside me, almost closing the door.

"There ain't no Miss Ruthie now," she said sadly. Then, in a voice which betrayed pride, "She's Lady Halloway. 'Is Lordship, 'e were a wery 'ot lover, 'e were—wouldn't take no for an answer and suchlike. After you'd gone away angry and no one knew where you'd gone, Miss Ruthie felt kind o' flat; but she kept on sayin' no to 'is Lordship, though she was always cryin'. Then that letter came from Americky. It kind o' took us by surprise; Miss Ruthie especially. We felt—well, you know, sir—disrespectable. So she gave way like, and now she's Lady Halloway. And there you are. We've 'ad a 'eap of trouble."

Little Ruthie the wife of that man! I had made them unrespectable, so she had rectified my mistake by marrying the father of Lottie's child!

"You'd better write."

She had edged herself into the garden and held the door at closing-point. I could see the house no longer. Her head looked out through the slit as though it had no body. I was sick and angry—angry because of Ruthie. Anger restored my determination. They should not condemn me without a hearing; their morality was stucco-fronted—a cheap imitation of righteousness.

I pushed roughly past Hetty like an insolent peddler, and left her bleating protests behind. In the hall I dropped my bags and entered my father's study unannounced.

He glanced up from under the hand with which his eyes were shaded. His mouth straightened. He went on with his writing, feigning that he had not heard me enter. I remembered the trick well—as a boy it had made punishment the more impressive. It was done for that purpose now; he had never accustomed himself to think of me as a grown man.

I watched him. How lean, and threadbare, and over-

worked he looked! How he tyrannized over himself! The hair had grown thin about the temples; his eyes were weak, his forehead lined. He had disciplined joy out of his life. But there was something big about him—a stern forcefulness of character which came of long years of iron purpose. He had failed, but he would not acknowledge his failure. All these years his daily routine of drudgery had remained unchanged. Outside the spring was stirring, just as it had stirred in his children's lives. But his windows were shut against the spring because he had to earn his daily bread. The anger I had felt turned to pity. He was so lonely in his strength. Had he been weaker, he would have been happier.

"You did not want to see me?"

He blotted his page carefully and laid aside his pen. "I had good reason." His voice was cold and tired.

"You can't judge of that; you haven't heard."

"I can conjecture."

"But I have at least the right to explain. You can't conjecture the details that led up to it."

"These things are usually led up to by the same details. All I know is that any meeting between us now can only cause pain, and I cannot afford to be upset. You have your standards of honor; I have mine. Evidently they are divergent. You didn't give me your confidence before you sailed; I don't invite it now."

He had allowed me to remain standing, making me feel my intrusion on his privacy. I had always felt that in talking to him I was keeping him from his work. My mind went back to the fear with which I had entered his study in the old days. And this was the end of it.

"You can never have cared much for me," I threw out bitterly, "if you can break with me so lightly."

His pale face flushed; his distant manner broke down. "How should you know how much I cared?"

"How should I know! All my life you've been silent and there were times——"

He interrupted. "It is because I cared so much. I

was so anxious for you and wanted you to do so well. I'm not demonstrative. I always hoped that we might be friends. But you never came to me with your troubles; from a little chap, anyone was better than your father—servants, your Uncle Spreckles, Ruthita, anybody. With me you were dumb."

"You never encouraged my confidence and now you condemn me unheard. Silence between us has become a habit."

He stabbed the blotting-paper with his pen. His emotions were stirred; he was afraid he might betray them. So he spoke hurriedly. "It's too late to cover old ground. We've drifted apart, that's certain—and now this has happened . . . this disgrace . . . this adultery of thoughts . . . this lust for a married woman."

I walked across to the window and drummed upon the panes. Across the garden a soft gray dusk was falling. Along those paths Ruthita and I had played; the garden was empty and very lonely. Scene after scene came back, made kindly by distance. I turned. "Father, I'm not going to let you turn me out until you know all about it. For the first time you've told me frankly that you wanted me. I was always frightened as a little chap."

Instead of taking me up angrily as I expected, he spoke gently. "Why shouldn't I want you? I thought you'd understand by the way I worked. Sit down, boy; why are you standing? How . . . how did it happen?"

The Snow Lady rapped on the door and almost entered. My father signed to her to go away, saying that we would come to her later. Then I told him. And while I told him I kept thinking how strange it was that until now, when we had quarreled, we should never have found one another, but, like two people eager to meet, had walked always at the same pace, in the same direction, out of sight, round and round on opposite sides of the same house.

It was dark when I finished. He leant out and laid his hand on my arm. "And now that it's all ended, we can make a new start together."

"It may not be all ended."

"But it is. You're not going to tell me that you're still hankering after a married woman?"

"I am."

The kindness went from his voice. He rang the bell, waited in silence till Hetty brought the lamp, and took it from her at the door to prevent her entering.

"You say it isn't ended, this criminal folly. I can't conceive what you mean by it. One of these days you'll drag my name through the dirt. There are other people to consider besides yourself. There's Ruthita—her husband's sensitive already. In fact, he doesn't want to meet you, and he doesn't want you to meet her. What it comes to is this: we can't be friends unless you give this woman up absolutely."

"It's not possible. Randall threatened to divorce her. If he does, it will be that I may marry her. I shall have to marry her, and I shall be jolly glad to marry her. What has happened since I left I can't tell. Until I know, I hold myself prepared. So I can't promise anything."

"The choice is between her and your family."

"I choose her."

"Then until you've come to your senses, there can be no communication between us."

He sat down noisily at his desk. "You'll excuse me; there's nothing more to be said."

When I still waited, he took up his pen. "I have an article here that I must get finished."

I walked slowly down the lane. The door swung to behind me. I felt that I was seeing this for the last time. All the old, trivial, sweet associations came thronging back: the dying affections, the lost innocence which had seemed so permanent, stretched out hands to restrain me. Even Hetty had condemned; it was written in her face. Long ago Hetty and I had viewed the world from the same angle, we had criticised and schemed against our tyrants together. The chapter of home life was ended. Whatever happened as regards Vi, there could be no going back.

CHAPTER II

DREAM HAVEN

I did not go to Woadley as I had planned. My position was too uncertain at present for me to venture where further explanations would be required. My father had made me aware of that. I was unwilling to cover the same ground of argument with Grandmother Cardover, so I had my lawyers visit me in London.

Until something had been definitely settled, I did not care to return to Oxford or to seek out any of my friends; I should at once be called upon to account for my erratic departure and prolonged absence. So I made myself inconspicuous in the crowds of London, waiting for some final word from Sheba. It was quite likely that none would ever come—and that would be an answer in itself. Yet, now that I had done what had seemed to me right and had thrust her from me, I hoped against hope that, somehow, she might come back. I felt that though I might have to wait for years, I would resolutely wait for her. No other woman could ever take her place. And none of this could I tell her. She might think that I had counted the cost and considered it too expensive. She might put the worst construction on the words she had overheard on that last night; yet unless she approached me first, I was irrevocably pledged to silence.

Too late for my peace of mind I recognized my weakness: if I had wanted her, I should have taken her strongly in the early days and faced the consequences; now, through making truces with my conscience and conventions, I had lived so long in thoughts of her that I should always desire her.

I would like to have gone to Ruthita, but that was forbidden. Lord Halloway riding the high horse of morality was exceedingly comic, but I knew exactly how men of his stamp argued: to introduce a questionable relation into the family was anathema. I wondered continually what secret causes lay behind Ruthita's marriage. I felt sure that she had consented on the impulse, and that love had had nothing to do with it. The suspicion that I was somehow responsible left me worried.

Spring had reached the point of perfection where it merges into summer. The tides of life flowed strongly through the dazzling streets of London; I was too young not to respond to their energy. Everywhere the persistent hope of spring planted banners of green and set them waving. Ragged shrubs in decrepit squares bubbled into blossom. Window-boxes lent a touch of braveness. Water-carts passed up and down parched streets, settling the dust. In the kind of suburb that walks always with a hole in its stocking, slatternly maids pressed their bosoms against area-railings chaffing with butcher-boy or policeman—their idea of love. Where a street-organ struck up, little children gathered, dancing in the gutter. Even the sullen Thames, the gray hair of London, was dyed to gold between the bridges by the splendid sun. The spirit of youth had invaded the city; flower-girls, shouting raucously above the traffic, shaking their posies in the face of every comer, seemed heralds of a new cheerfulness, shaming Despair of his defiance.

This severing of oneself from friendship was dull. Leisurely crowds laughing along sunlit pavements, made me ache for companionship. I was in this frame of mind when I chanced to think of Uncle Obad's letter. It had met me at Plymouth on my arrival, and bore the characteristically flamboyant address of *Dream Haven, Dorking*.

He must have chosen Dorking as a place of residence because it had given its name to a famous breed of fowls. Perhaps he thought such a neighborhood would be pro-

pitious to his own experiments. His letter was brief and to the point: if I could spare the time, he and Aunt Lavinia would feel honored to entertain me.

Uncle Obad was stilted in his written use of language; he felt *honored* when he meant to say *jolly well glad*. There was always an obedient servant ring about the way in which he signed himself. The training he had undergone as secretary to charitable societies had spoilt him for familiar letter-writing.

Since the Rapson incident, things had never been quite the same. My good fortune made him uneasy; it placed a gap between us and, I suppose, served to emphasize his non-success. Of his new mode of life since the Christian Boarding House had been abandoned, I had only heard. The thought of him had lain a dusty memory at the back of my mind—which made it all the kinder that he should now remember me. Perhaps he had heard before writing of how Pope Lane had planned to receive me.

As I steamed into the station I hung my head out of the window to catch first sight of him. Yes, there he was. He had grown stouter; his purple whiskers which still bristled like shaving-brushes, had faded to a milky white. He was wearing a long fawn dust-coat which flapped about the calves of his legs. He carried the old exaggerated air of blustering importance, but was a trifle more careless in his dress. His carelessness, however, was now the prosperous untidiness of one who could afford it. In his lapel he wore a scarlet geranium.

As I stepped out, he came fussily towards me. "Very good of you to come, I'm sure—kind and very thoughtful."

It was his pretense manner—the one he adopted with grown-ups. I wanted to remind him that with me he could take off his armor.

"Still go in for breeding hens?" I asked him.

His face brightened. "I should say so. Our little place is quite a menagerie. We've cats, and dogs, and rabbits, and a parrot. And hens! Well, I should say so."

"*And hens,*" I laughed. "Remember the old white hen

you gave me? It laid one egg and then ate it; after that it died."

"Should have given it gravel or oyster-shells." Poultry-raising was a subject he never treated lightly. He fussed along beside me, explaining with his old enthusiasm the mysterious ways of fowls.

Outside the station a dog-cart was standing, with a fat little piebald pony between the shafts. We stuffed the baggage under the back-seat, and squeezed into the front together. The pony started off at a smart trot.

"D'you know what this reminds me of?—That first day we spent together. You remember—when you drove me away from Pope Lane behind Dollie?"

He pulled out his handkerchief and trumpeted. His eyes became dreamy beneath his bushy brows. "A long time ago! They were good days, but not as good as these, old chap."

We fell to remembering. The pony slowed down to a walk. How everything came back as we talked! And how ripping the old Spuffler had always been, and how ripping it was to be near him now! He had put aside his armor of pretense and was talking naturally. We talked together of that first day when we had met the gipsies in the Surrey woodland, and we talked of the Red House, and of all the times that we had been happy. A warm wind fluttered about us. I caught Uncle Obad looking at me fixedly, dropping his eyes and then looking up again, as though he were trying to satisfy himself.

"That *Sir* don't seem to have spoiled you."

The red walls of Dorking were left behind. A white chalky road stretched before us, climbing upward to the skyey downs; over to the left rose a wooded ridge, somnolent with pines; to the right lay a village-common across which geese waddled in solemn procession.

Uncle Obad roused himself and shook the reins. "This won't buy a pair of shoes for the baby. Aunt Lavinia's waiting for us; she's just as keen as I was to see whether you've altered." Then to the pony, "Gee-up, Toby."

We turned off into the pine-wood by a narrow roadway. The fragrance of balsam made me long to close my eyes. At the edge of the road, on either side, ran a ditch through which water tinkled over gravel. On its banks grew fern and foxglove. The silent aisles of the wood were carpeted with the tan of fallen needles. Sunlight, drifting between branches, slashed golden rags in the olive-tinted shadows. My mind became a blank through pure enjoyment as I listened to the monologue of gay chatter that was going on beside me. He was doing for me now just what he had done for me so often as a child, throwing down the walls of conventional tyrannies and showing me the road of escape to nature.

Suddenly out of the basking stillness rose a farmyard clamor—cocks crowing, ducks quacking, and the boastful clucking of hens. We had reached the top of the ridge and were bowling along the level. Toby pricked up his ears and quickened his trotting. Round a bend we swung into sight of a low-thatched house, standing in a clearing. Its windows were leaded and opened outwards. In front grew a garden, sun-saturated, riotous with flowers, and partly hidden by a high hawthorn hedge. In the hedge was a white swing-gate, from which a red-brick path ran up to the threshold. Across the gate one had a glimpse of beehives standing a-row; the air was heavy with mingled scents of pine, wild thyme, and honey. The impression that fastened on my imagination was one of exquisite cleanliness: the sky, the gleaming chalk road, the white-painted woodwork of the cottage, everything was dazzlingly spotless.

Our wheels had hardly halted before the gate, when I saw Aunt Lavinia in the doorway unfastening her apron. Neat and methodical as ever, she folded it carefully, and laid it on a chair before coming out to us.

"Lavinia, Lavinia! We're here," shouted Uncle Obad.

She came down the path, prim and unhurried, determined not to let herself go. "Repose is refinement" she used to tell me. Nothing in her manner was ruffled. She still

carried herself with a certain grave air of sweet authority. The rustle of her starched print-dress gave her an atmosphere of nurse-like austerity. She had not changed, save that the look of worry had gone from her face, and her eyes were untired.

"It's glad I am to see you." She spoke quietly and, when she kissed me, was careful not to crumple her dress.

"Dignified and graceful—that's her," said Uncle Obad.

We had plenty to talk about while we were getting over our first strangeness. I had to see the house and all its arrangements. My room was at the back, looking out from the ridge over smoking tree-tops far away across undulating downs.

Windows and doors were always open, so the passages were blowy with the dreamy, drowsy smell of green things growing. Creepers tumbled across sills; leaves tapped whenever the breeze stirred them; pigeons flew into the dining-room at meal-times and perched on Uncle Obad's shoulder. Usually everything within a house is man-made. At Dream Haven Nature was encouraged to tiptoe across the threshold; so bees entered humming, and blackbirds came for grain to the windows, and all day long the wild things were sending their ambassadors. Beating wings of birds and cooing of doves filled one's ears with the peace and adventure of contentment.

These were the recreations of Dream Haven, but its stern business, as one might suppose, was the raising of fowls. At the back of the cottage on a southern slope were arranged coops, and pens, and houses, gleaming white against the golden gravel like a miniature military encampment. Each pen had its trumpeter, who strode forth at intervals to raise his challenge; whereupon every male in camp tried to outdo him, from the youngest stripling, whose shrill falsetto broke like a boy's voice in the middle, to the deep, rich tones of the oldest campaigner. Falsetto, tenor, bass, baritone shook the stillness like an army on the march, with rattle of accoutrements, and brass-bands playing, *cock-a-doodle-doo, cock-a-doodle-doo*.

In the hush that followed from far away, as from scattered detachments replying, came the counter-sign. Below the ridge in the village on the downs every rooster felt his reputation endangered. In farmhouses out of sight the challenge was caught up and the boast flung back. To one listening intently, the clamor could be heard spreading across the countryside till it spent itself at last in the hazy distance. Then the ladies of the camp commenced their flatteries, *tuck-tuck-tuck-tuck-tuck-tuck, our men did best, our men did best.*

Uncle Obad took childish delight in the comedy; he knew the voice of each male bird in his yard and the sequence of precedence in which they should aspire. If they got out of order, he would recognize at once which cockerel was trying to oust his senior. If the ambitious fellow was one of his experiments in crossing strains, he was vastly tickled. To him they all had their personalities; he used to say that a poultry-yard could teach you a whole lot about humans.

"Why don't you men go out for a walk?" said Aunt Lavinia; "I'm sure Dante would like to look about."

She knew that we had always had our secrets. It was seven o'clock; there were still some hours of daylight. We set off through the poultry-runs down the hillside till we came to the edge of the clearing; Uncle Obad looked round furtively to make sure that we were unobserved, then he beckoned and slipped behind a shed. There he sat down with his back against the warm wooden wall and we lit our pipes. "She makes me take exercise now," he grunted between puffs; "thinks I'm getting fat."

"Perhaps she's right. Aunt Lavinia's always been right ever since I can remember."

"I should say so. She doesn't look it, but she's always worn the trousers, and small blame to her. But she was wrong once."

"When was that?"

He narrowed his eyes and watched the smoke curl up into the velvet air. When it had drifted a few yards away,

one could imagine that it was a galleon cloud sailing slowly through infinity. I got to thinking how much more picturesque the world becomes when we lose our standards of perspective. Uncle Obad had won his happiness by making small things important to himself.

He did not answer my question. I was too lazy to trouble him again. The rich spicy fragrance of woodlands lulled my senses. I watched through a gap in the trees how the sun's rays shortened across the downs. All the out-door world was bathed in tepid light. The fierceness had gone out of the day.

The Spuffler always made me philosophize; he was a failure, but he had found a secret. He had known how to discover nooks and crannies in the persistent present where he could be content. I had lost that fine faculty for carelessness since I had grown older.

He knocked out his pipe and commenced to refill it. "But she wasn't always right," he chuckled. "I may be only an old knacker, but once I was righter than her.—What d'you think of all this?" He jerked his thumb across his shoulder.

"It's the last word . . . just what we always dreamt."

"That's why I called it Dream Haven. Not so bad for a man of my years after keeping a Christian Boarding House!"

"Make it pay?"

"Not yet. Don't need to, by Golly."

"Don't need to! How's that?"

"Business knowledge. Sound judgment. Backing my opinion when the odds were against me. I doubled up my fists and stood square against the world."

"A kind of brave Horatius?"

"Who's he?"

"Kept the bridge or something. Was a friend of Macaulay."

"Never heard of him. Did he keep poultry?"

"May have done; he was the kind of man who'd keep

anything he laid his hands on. But how the dickens d'you hang on to this place if it isn't paying?"

"Got money. Got money to burn. Got enough to last me to my journey's end without earning a penny."

He was a small boy boasting. What a lot of fun he'd have extracted from being Squire of Woadley. I wished I might learn how to spuffle; it so multiplied one's opportunities for pleasure. But I couldn't get as excited as he expected; I had heard him talk this way before on a certain day at Richmond.

"Did you make it out of the boarding-house?" I inquired incredulously.

He laughed deep down in his throat. "Not exactly. I received an envelope one morning; inside was a slip of paper on which was written '*Compensation for a damaged character.*' There was no address."

"But there must have been more than that."

"You bet. There was a banker's draft. How much for? Guess."

"Can't guess."

"Five thousand pounds."

"Whoof! One of your charitable bigwigs sent it?"

"Not half. Came from Rapson. That's what comes of sticking to your friends. That's why I say that your Aunt wasn't always wiser than the poor old knacker."

"Mines?"

"So he said. He's been to see me since then. The way your Aunt Lavinia treated him was as funny as a cock without feathers.—I always believed in Rapson.—He had a bad streak though."

"Which one?"

He passed over my slur. "Women."

"Kitty?"

"That's what I meant. He's sorry now; wishes he'd married her."

"Humph! If you don't make your place pay, what are you doing?"

His face took on an expression of intense earnestness.

"Breeding the Spreckles. Remember them, don't you? I had terrible work at first; couldn't make the strain permanent; in the third and fourth generations it was always going back to the original crossings. Well, now I've done it. Come and look at 'em."

The old bond was established. His enthusiasm and my response to it swept aside the misunderstandings of years. I seemed a little boy, following him into a retreat of impossible glamour. He showed me a pen of magnificent slate-blue fowls; they had the extra toe of the Dorking, the drooping comb of the Leghorn, yellow legs of the Game, and full plump body of the Plymouth Rock. He enumerated their merits, insisted that I should guess what mixings of blood had gone to their making, and was delighted when he found I had not forgotten the old knowledge he had taught me. He was going to enter them at the shows this year, but he was worried over one point—what name should he call them?

"But you've given them their name."

"I know, I know, old chap; but my conscience troubles me. Yer see, I shouldn't have been able to do it if it hadn't been for Rapsn. I think I ought to call 'em the *Rapsons*."

"If you feel like that, why don't you?"

"He won't let me."

"Share the glory then. Call 'em *Spreckles* in public, and *Rapsons* among ourselves."

His simple old face lit up. "Believe you've solved it."

We returned to our place by the shed, from which we could watch the haze of evening drifting across the billowy uplands. In the village at our feet, cattle were being driven home lowing to the milking. On the common boys were playing cricket; their laughter came to us softened by distance.

"What made you ask me?" I said.

"Ask you? Ask you what?"

"To come and visit you."

"Why shouldn't I?"

"I don't know. But I'm not popular at Pope Lane at present; I believe you know the reason. Grandmother Cardover must have told Aunt Lavinia that this was going to happen. That was why you sent that letter to the ship to meet me."

He looked shy and awkward, and drew his hat down over his brows; I knew that he was making up his mind not to answer.

"When I was a boy," I continued, "I always felt that I could come to you frankly. You, somehow, understood before anything had been said. I thought, perhaps, you might have understood this time, and that that was why you asked me."

He threw his arm across my shoulder. "I did, old chap. But you've grown older and, since you've got all this book-learning and all these grand friends, I kind o' felt I was a stranger—thought you didn't need me like you used to."

"My grand friends and book-learning won't help me this turn," I grumbled slowly. "I may need you pretty badly—perhaps, more than ever I did. You've heard?"

"Umph!"

"What d'you think about it?"

"It doesn't much matter what an old knacker thinks about anything."

"Why on earth d'you keep calling yourself an old knacker?"

"Dunno. It's amusin'. It's a kind o' luxury after spuffling all my life to be able at last to depreciate one's self. Everything's amusin'. I know you are; I suppose I am; there's no doubt about your father. Nothing's over-serious in this gay old world. Mustn't take things to heart, old chap. Look at me, what I've come through. Here I am and not much the worse for wear—battered, but useful, yours truly Obadiah Spreckles, successful breeder of an entirely new strain of perpetually laying hens." He gave himself a resounding whack upon the chest and cocked his eye at me.

"What do I think about you and the lady in America? Speaking as the ex-proprietor of a Christian Boarding House, I think it's shocking. Speaking as a man of leisure, I think it's confoundedly human. Speaking as a shipwrecked cabin-boy who's suddenly been promoted to captain, I should say that it's one of life's ups and downs. There's no accounting for how love takes a man; it's as fluky as settings of eggs—all cocks one day, all hens to-morrow, and the day after that nothing. Dash my boots, I sometimes think that nobody's to blame for anything. Love's shocking or interesting, according to your fancy. Take Lavinia and myself. I haven't made her a good husband. I've been a failure and a slacker. I've made her happy now only by an accident. People look at us and wonder what we find in one another. They don't know—can't see beneath the surface. We never had any children. It's been hard fighting. But I swear she's never regretted.—Aye, it's wonderful the pains God takes to bring a man and a woman together. These things ain't accidents. If you're meant to have her, you may have to wait, but nothing can stop you—just like me and my fowls. Life's a *leading*. 'He leadeth me beside the still waters,' eh, what! But it's often rough treading till you get there.—That's all I have to say about it, old chap."

"The door of Pope Lane's shut against me," I told him. "Ruthie's married the fellow I detested. They're none of them talking to me now."

The old fellow turned on me snorting like a stallion. "That don't matter, lad. You're your own world. Do without 'em. Everything comes right in the end."

Dream Haven! How cool the name sounds! What memories of sunshiny mornings it brings back. Day after day I watched and waited for the letter from America. There were times when I made sure that I could feel it approaching. "It will be here to-morrow," I said.

I tortured myself by picturing how different life would have been had I taken Randall at his word. It was the kind of torture that became a luxury. I should have

brought her to Dream Haven, perhaps. I played with my fancy, pretending that we were here together; so actual were my imaginings that I was incredulous when, on coming to myself, I found her absent. The dreams were more real than the reality.

Wakened in the morning by the twittering of birds, I would raise myself on my elbow and marvel at the sweet flushed face beside me on the pillow and the glorious, yellow streaming hair. Slowly it would fade and vanish. There were walks which we took through the lonely woodlands when all the delayed intimacies of love filled life with unashamed passion. There were wild days on the downs, when rain and wind, driving our bodies together, stung me to a new protecting ecstasy. There were quiet evenings in the gloaming—Sunday evenings were the best—when Vi sat at the piano playing and singing, while Dorrie knelt beside her, fingering her dress. All these ghost-scenes stand clear in my memory as though they had happened.

I must have cultivated this unreal life to the point of danger in my effort to escape the ache of the present. Had I lived by myself I might have crossed the border-line, but the comedy of Uncle Obad was always drawing me back. He kept watch over me like a kind old spaniel.

In the morning from where I sat in the garden, I could see him farther down the slope through the orchard, trotting in and out his pens with his disreputable dust-coat flapping. Just as once, when he had no money, the appearance of affluence had been his hobby, so now, when he could afford to dress respectably, he delighted in looking shabby. He left his clothes unfastened in the most unexpected places; Aunt Lavinia was continually making grabs at him and buttoning him up. In the afternoon she sent us off for long walks together to prevent his getting fat. On these occasions he would explain his loose philosophy, which consisted of a large-minded, stalwart carelessness.

“Keep your end up; it’s in each one of us to be happy. Don’t do too much remembering; live your day as it comes.

Your Grandmother calls me the Spuffler—so I am. Where'd I be now, I ask you, if I hadn't spuffed?"

So the summer fled by, and the woods grew browner, and the air had a sharper tang. The letter from Sheba had not come. I could mark time no longer; at last I left for Woadley.

CHAPTER III

NARCOTICS

I WAS twenty-six when I entered into possession of Woadley. By my grandfather's will I inherited an annual income of seven thousand pounds. I was at an age when, for most men, everything of importance lies in the future and that which lies behind is of no consequence—in the nature of an experiment.

I did not regard my past in that light. It was vital. Until the woman I loved should share my fortunes I felt the future to be an indefinite postponement. How she could come into my life again I dared not surmise; that she would come, I never doubted. I knew now that the letter which I had both hoped for and dreaded, would never arrive. For Dorrie's sake they had decided to remain together. In my wiser moments I was glad of it; I knew that, had she chosen otherwise, our love would have been degraded.

Strong influences were brought to bear to press me into public life. My situation and training entitled me to take up a position of some local importance. I might have stood for Parliament, but I shrank from publicity. All I asked was to be left alone to follow up my own interests in quiet. I had come so suddenly into a sphere of power which I had done nothing to merit, that ambitions which had still other ambitions for their goal, ceased to allure me. My temperament was natively bookish; by nature I was a Fellow of Lazarus and by compulsion a conscientious country squire. When I was not at Oxford, dreaming in libraries, I was at Woadley, superintending the practical management of my estate.

The joy of sex and its fulfilment in a home, which apply the spur to most men's activities, to me were denied; it was unthinkable that I should marry any woman other than Vi. The energies which should have found a domestic expression with me became the mental stimulus of an absorbing scholarly pursuit.

Through my Oxford lectures and fugitive contributions to periodicals, I began to be known as an authority on the intellectual revolt of the Renaissance; by slow degrees I set about writing the life of that strange contradiction, half-libertine, half-saint, Æneas Sylvius Piccolomini.

Engaged in these employments, I grew to love the smooth gray days of Woadley which stole by ghost-like and unnumbered. And I came to love the Woadley country with a passion which was as much due to its associations as to its beauty. When I had grown tired of researches into things ancient, one of my greatest joys was to plod to Ransby through rutted lanes deep in hedges, and so out to the north beach where the sea strummed against the land, and the wind raged, and the blackened hull of the wreck crouched beneath the weight of sky.

Grandmother Cardover's shop saw me often. There in the keeping-room, with its dull red walls and leisurely loud ticking clock, we would talk together of bygone times and of those which were, maybe, coming. At first she urged me to marry, and to take up the position in the county which should be mine. But soon, with the easy fatalism of old age, she accepted me for what I was, and ceased to worry.

With my father I held no communication—the breach had become final; so of Ruthita I heard next to nothing. But as regards Lord Holloway, quite inadvertently I increased my knowledge.

One squally night I was returning from Ransby, driving up the sodden road to the Hall, when my attention was attracted by a camp-fire. I halted out of curiosity, and struck across the turf to the light. Between me and the fire was a wind-break of young firs, a diminutive planta-

tion behind which, as behind bars, figures prowled. As the flames shot up, the figures yearned toward the clouds; as the flames died down, the figures seemed to creep into the ground. On reaching the wind-break a lurcher growled, and I heard a man's voice telling the beast to lie quiet. I was about to declare myself, when a hand was laid on my shoulder. I leapt aside, peering into the darkness.

"All right, brother," a voice said huskily. "I'm meaning you no hurt."

A woman's face pushed itself out of the blackness; by the light of the fire I saw that it was Lilith's.

"Now you're here, brother, we've come back to Woadley."

She spoke as though our meeting had been pre-arranged.

Gazing through the trees I saw the old yellow caravan and G'liath; the gaudy woman was there, and the hag who had tried to tell Vi's fortune on the marshes.

The huddled gipsy tents became an accustomed sight and the center of a new interest in my landscape. The proud lawlessness of the gipsies appealed to my own suppressed wildness. They opened a door of escape from commonplace environment. Their unannounced comings and goings had an atmosphere of mystery and stealth which filled me with excitement. Of a night I would look out from my bedroom windows and see the red glow of their camp across the park-land; in the morning nothing would remain but blackened turf and silence.

I went on many tramping expeditions with Lilith. She had become curiously elflike and wilful since those early days. She seemed to live wholly in the moods and sensations of the present; of the past she would speak only in snatches. Sometimes, when she softened, she would mention Ruthita; but it was long before I discovered her secret and the reason why for so many years the gipsies had refused to camp at Woadley.

All one day in the height of summer we had wandered, across meadows and by unfrequented by-roads, too content

to pay heed to where we were going; when evening overtook us we were miles from home. It was too late to turn back, unless we walked on to the nearest village and hired a trap and drove. Lilith scouted the proposal with scornful eyes as too utterly conventional. We would make a camp for the night and return to-morrow.

There, alone in the open, with great clouds thumbing the western sky, and birds sinking into tree-tops singing, "Home, home, home," life liberated itself and rose in the throat as though it had never been bound and civilized. We spoke only in monosyllables; even words were a form of captivity. Collecting brushwood, we built our fire and ate our meal between the walls of bushes. Slowly the silver trumpet of the moon rose above leafy spires.

We made a strange pair, Lilith and I—she the untamed savage, gloriously responsive, and I, for all my attitudes of mind, outwardly the sluggish product of reserve and education. Through the gray smoke I watched her, with her red shawl falling from her splendid shoulders, her glittering ear-rings and her large soft eyes. I told myself stories about her quite in the old childish vein. I recalled how the Bantam and I had always been hoping to find her. What fun it would be to vanish for a time, leaving responsibilities behind, and to take to the road together! White mists, rising from the meadows, erected a tent about us which towered to the sky. Here in the open was privacy from the impertinent knocking of destiny.

But she was not thinking of me. Her eyes gazed far away. Her arm was hollowed and her head bowed, as though a little one pressed against her. With her right hand she fumbled at her breast, loosening her bodice. Her body swayed slowly to and fro in a soothing, rocking motion. I had seen her like this before when she thought no one was looking.

Leaning forward I plucked a twig from the fire to light my pipe. She threw herself back from me startled and sprang to her feet. "Don't touch me." Her voice was hoarse and choking.

Looking up from where I sat, I saw that her bosom panted and that her nostrils were quivering with animal fright. But it was her eyes that told me; they were wide and fixed like those of one who has been roused from sleep, and is not yet fully awake.

"I wasn't trying to touch you, Lil. I'm your pal, girl, Dante Cardover."

When I spoke she came to herself and recognized me. Her fear vanished and her arms fell limp to her side. "I'm goin'."

"But what's the trouble? I thought we were to camp here to-night."

"Dun know." She swept back the hair from her forehead and drew her shawl tighter. "I dun this before, just the two of us—and it didn't end happy."

"But not with me."

"Afore ever I knew you, silly. When I was little more'n a child—long time ago."

We stamped out the fire before we left, and stole silently across the moonlit meadows. She walked ahead at first in defiance; presently, ashamed of the distrust she had shown, she fell back and we traveled side by side.

"Lil, I watched you; you were dreaming that you had your little baby back."

She placed her hand in mine, but she gave me no answer.

"Who was he—the man who did this to you long ago, when you camped alone together?"

She turned her face away; her voice shook with passion. "I don't have to tell you; you know 'im."

The people were few with whom we were both acquainted. I ran over the names in my mind; the truth flashed out on me.

"Was it because of that you wouldn't camp at Woadley?"

She bent her head, but the cloud of hatred in her face would have told me.

After learning this new fact about Halloway, he was never long absent from my mind; for Lilith, though we

never referred to him and she had at no time mentioned him by name, was a continual reminder. I became familiar with his doings through the papers. He was making a mark for himself in politics; there was even a talk that he might find a seat in the cabinet. I read of Lady Halloway's seconding of her husband's ambitions. From time to time her portrait was printed among those of society hostesses. But this Ruthita was unreal to me; she had nothing to do with the shy girl-friend whom I had known. Of the true Ruthita I learnt nothing.

I often wondered what was the condition of affairs between herself and Halloway. Was she happy? Was he kind? Was it possible that she should have outlived her first judgment of him? Perhaps all this outward display of success had its hidden emptiness. Behind Halloway lay a host of ruined lives, Lilith's among them, the waste of which he could not justify.

I had been five years at Woadley, when my work made it necessary that I should spend some weeks in London in order to be near libraries. It was just after Christmas that I came to town. With my usual clinging to old associations, I took rooms at Chelsea, almost within sight of the mansion which had witnessed my uncle's brief reign of splendor. From my windows I could see the turgid river sweeping down to Westminster, and the nurse-girls with perambulators and scarlet dots of soldiers loitering beneath bare trees of the Embankment.

On rising one morning, I found that the subdued grays and browns had vanished—that London was glistening with snow. My spirits rose to an unaccustomed pitch of buoyancy; I tossed aside my writing and went out into the streets. Coming to the Spuffler's old house I halted; the memory of the Christmas I had spent there leapt into my mind with every detail sharpened. Things which I had not thought of for years came back luminously—scraps of conversation, gestures, childish excitements. This wintry morning was reminiscent of a snow-lit, sun-dazzled morning of long ago. I recalled how Ruthita had bounced into

my room to let me see her presents; how she had balanced herself on the edge of my bed in her long white night-gown, with her legs curled under her and her small feet showing; how she had laughed at my care of her when I wrapped the counterpane about her shoulders to prevent her from catching cold. Every memory was somehow connected with Ruthita. And here I stood, a man of thirty, looking up at the windows from which we had once gazed out together—and I had not seen her to speak to for five years.

I could not get her out of mind. I did not want to. I kept tracing resemblances to her in the girls whom I passed in the streets. Some of them were carrying their skates, with flying hair and flushed faces. Others, whom I met after lunch in the theatre districts, were going to matinées with school-boy brothers. I wanted to be back again in the old intimacy, walking beside her. Since that was impossible, I set myself deliberately to remember.

In the afternoon I strolled into the Green Park. Constitution Hill was scattered with spectators all agape to see the quality drive by. Every now and then a soldier or statesman would be recognized; the word would pass from mouth to mouth with a flutter of excitement. The trees enameled in white, the grass in its sparkling blanket, the sky banked with soft clouds, the flushed faces—everything added its hint of animated and companionable kindness.

Of a sudden in the throng of flashing carriages, my attention was caught by an intense white face approaching, half-hidden in a mass of night-black hair—the face was smaller than ever, and even more pathetically patient. By her side sat the man whom I now almost hated, looking handsome and important; the years had dealt well with him, and had heightened his air of dignity and aristocratic assurance. He was speaking to her lazily while she paid him listless attention, never meeting his glance. It was plain to see that, whatever he had or had not been to other women, his passion for her was unabated. She looked a

snow-drop set beside an exotic orchid; the demure simplicity of her beauty was accentuated by the contrast. Her wandering gaze fell in my direction; for an instant my gaze absorbed her. She started forward from the cushions; her features became nipped with eagerness. Those wonderful eyes of hers, which had always had power to move me, seemed to speak of years of longing. A smile parted her lips; her listlessness was gone. She leant out of the carriage, as though she would call to me.

Lord Halloway's hand had gone to his hat, as he turned with a gracious expression, searching the crowd to discover the cause of his wife's excitement. His eyes met mine. His face hardened. Seizing Ruthita's arm, he dragged her down beside him. The carriage swept by and was lost in the stream of passing traffic. All was over in less time than it has taken to narrate.

That night at Chelsea I could not sleep for thinking. Across the ceiling I watched the lights of the police-boats flash in passing. I listened to the river grumbling between its granite walls. Late taxis purred by; I took to counting them. Big Ben lifted up his solemn voice, speaking to the stars of change and time. I thought, imagined, remembered. What had happened to us all that we were so gravely altered? What had happened to her? What had he done to quench her? Then came the old, forgotten question: had I had anything to do with it?

Next day I set myself to conquer my restlessness, but my accustomed interests had lost their fascination. Neither that day, nor in those that followed, could I recover my grip on my habitual methods of life. What were the elations, temptations, disappointments of a dead past compared with those that were now in the acting? My scholarship, my love of books, my undertakings at Woadley had only been in the nature of narcotics; I had drugged myself into partial forgetfulness. Now the old affections, like old wounds, ached and irked me. One glimpse of Ruthita's white intensity had stabbed me into keenest remembrance.

I *had* to see her again; the hunger to hear her speak was on me—to listen to the sound of her voice.

Several times I saw her driving in the Park, sometimes alone, sometimes with Halloway. She never looked at me, but I was certain she was aware of me by the way her cheek grew pale. Only a few years ago I had been half her life, free to hold her, to come and go with her, to disregard her; now she passed me unnoticed. I haunted all places where I might expect to find her; whether I met or missed her my pain was the same. At the back of my mind was the constant dread that her husband would hurry her away to where I could not follow.

It was a blustering afternoon in early March, on a day of laughing and crying—one of those raw spring days, before spring really commences, capricious as a young girl nearing womanhood, without reason gay and without reason serious. In the sunshine one could believe that it was almost summer, but winter lurked in the shadows. A flush of young green spread through the tree-tops; in open spaces crocuses shivered near together. The streets were boisterous with gusty puffs of wind which sent dust and papers circling. In stiff ranks, like soldiers, the houses stood, erect, straining their heads into the sky, as if trying to appear taller. Clouds hurried and fumed along overhead travel-routes, and rent gashes in their sides as if with knives, letting through the sudden turquoise. Presently slow drops began to patter. Umbrellas shot up. Bus-drivers unstrapped their capes. In the Circus flower-girls picked up their baskets and ran for shelter.

On arriving in the Mall I found people standing along the open pavement in a lean, straggling line, despite the threatened deluge. I learnt that royalty were expected. Soon I heard a faint and far-off cheering. A policeman raised his arm; traffic drew up beside the curb. Just as I had caught the flash of Life Guards and the clatter of their accoutrements, a closed brougham reined in across my line of vision. With an exclamation of annoyance I was moving farther down the pavement, when a small

gloved hand stretched out from the carriage-window and touched me. I turned sharply, and found myself gazing into Ruthita's eyes. She signed to me to open the door. Before the coachman could notice who had entered, I was beside her. Clutching my arm, she leant out and ordered, "Drive to Pope Lane."

CHAPTER IV

RUTHITA

WE lay back against the cushions. We acted like conspirators—it was difficult to tell why. The surprise of meeting her thus suddenly had deprived me of words. It must have been the same with her; we clasped hands in silence.

“I had to see you—had to speak to you.”

She was panting—almost crying.

“Of course. Why not? It was foolish to go on the way we were going.”

“Yes, foolish and heartbreaking. It wasn’t as though we were wanting to do anything wicked—only to meet one another, as we used to.”

Her voice trailed off into a little shivering sob; she flickered her eye-lids to prevent the tears from gathering.

“Ruthie, you mustn’t carry on so.” Then, “What has he done to you?” I asked fiercely. “You’re afraid.”

“He’s guessed.”

“Guessed what?”

“What you never knew.”

“I don’t understand.”

“I can’t tell you. If you’d guessed, it might have made all the difference.”

I did not dare to speak—her whisper was so ashamed. Her hand was hot in mine. She withdrew it. When I leant over her she shuddered, just as the trees had done when they knew the rain was coming, as though I were a thing to her both sweet and dreadful. She took my face between her hands, and yet shrank back from me. She delighted in and feared the thing she was doing.

The rain volleyed against the carriage, shutting us in as with a tightly drawn curtain; yet, did I look up, through the gray mist the tepid gold of the sun was shining.

"Ruthie, it seems almost too good to be true that we're alone at last together—to have you all to myself."

"Did you ever want me, Dannie?"

"*Did I ever want you!*"

"But as much as you wanted her?"

"Differently, yes."

"You poor boy. And you didn't get either of us."

"Couldn't be helped, Ruthie. That's life—to be always wanting and never getting. But I have you now and, perhaps, one day——"

"But how can you? She's married."

"One can't tell. Things come unexpectedly. I didn't expect half-an-hour ago that I'd be with you."

She fell to asking me little stabbing questions. When I only answered her vaguely, "Don't let's start with secrets," she implored me.

"But it's five years—there's so much to explain."

"Yes—on both sides."

"You seemed—seemed to dislike him," I said. "I never understood——"

She took me up quickly. "Nor did I. Don't let's talk about it—not yet, Dante."

So I told her about my doings, the book I was writing and the little daily round at Woadley; and then I told her of why I had quarreled with my father.

"But he let me marry Halloway, and you've never——"

I laughed. "Ah, but no matter what Halloway did as a bachelor, he was discreet when it came to marriage."

She drew me forward to the light; doubt was in her eyes. "But you—you're unhappy too."

"I've gained everything I played for; I played to lose."

"Everything?"

"I didn't deserve Vi. And I didn't deserve you; if I had, I shouldn't have lost you."

Not until I had replied did she realize how much she

had told me. She was not happy! I wanted to ask her questions, so many questions—questions which I had no right to ask, nor she to answer.

“And you—you have no children?”

She hesitated. “No.”

I rubbed the damp from the panes. We were in Stoke Newington. The storm was over; streets and roof-tops shone as with liquid fire. Children going home from school, were laughing and playing. They might have been myself and Ruthie of years ago.

“They won’t see me,” I warned her.

“Who?”

“Folks at Pope Lane.”

“They’re not there. Only Hetty’s left to take care of the house. They’ve gone away for a few days.”

“Then I can see it all again. We can walk in the garden together and pretend that things are exactly as they were.”

“Oh, Dannie!” she cried. “I *can* call you Dannie, can’t I?”

Time slipped away. She was my little sister now—no longer Lady Halloway. At the posts before the passage we alighted—that was the first news the coachman had of whom he had been driving. We went slowly up the lane, where the shadows of the limes groped like tentacles fingering the sunshine. When I felt beneath the creepers and the bell jangled faintly, Ruthita clutched my arm, attempting to appear bold.

Hetty stared at us. “Well, I’ll be blown!”

We pushed by her smiling, assuring her that we had no objection. Not until we had rounded the house, did I hear the rattle of the door closing.

Nothing ever changed in that walled-in garden. Flowers grew in the same places—crocuses, daffodils, and hyacinths. Peaches on the wall would soon ripen. Presently sunflowers, like sentinels in gold helmets, would stand in stately line. Pigeons strutted on the slates of houses opposite or wheeled against the sky. There was the window of Ruthita’s bedroom, up to which I had so often called.

The hole, which had been bricked up between the Favarts' garden, was still discernible. Everything retained its record; only we had changed.

Truants again, stealing an hour together, I listened expectant to hear Hetty call, "Dant-ee. Dant-ee. Bed-time." The old excitement clutched my heart. Her starched skirt would rustle down the path, and we would run into the gooseberry bushes to hide. I glanced at the study-window. Surely I should see my father seated there, leaning across the desk with his head propped by his arm. Surely that hand of Ruthita's in my own was growing smaller. I should turn to find a child in a short print-frock, with clusters of ringlets on her shoulders. A shutter in my mind had opened; the past had become present. Ah, but I was no longer anxious to escape. The walled-in garden was all I wanted. I was tired of liberty. I was ready to be commanded. I was willing that others should order my life.

That the illusion might not slip from me, I half shut my eyes. Drip, drip, drip, from eaves and branches! The earth was stirring in the gentle quiet. Through drenched bushes and on the vivid stretch of lawn blackbirds were hopping, delving with their yellow bills. Perhaps I was dwindling into a small boy, just as I had once hoped in the forest that I might suddenly shoot up into manhood. How absurd to believe that I was thirty, and had seen so much of disillusionment! That was all a dream out of which I was waking—I had been here all the time in the narrow confines of the walled-in garden. The old enchantment of familiar sensations stole upon me—I was Dannie Cardover of the Red House playing tricks with his imagination.

How did it happen? Was it I or was it Ruthie? Her lips were pressing mine. A step came down the path behind us. We sprang apart, laughing softly with reckless joy at our impropriety. Which of us would have thought ten years ago that there would be anything improper in being caught kissing?

Hetty pretended not to have seen us, but her flustered face told its story.

"D'you remember, Hetty, how I once found you doing that to John?"

She writhed her hands under her apron, trying to appear shocked and not to smile. "I remember, Sir Dante; 'taint likely I'd forget." Then, disregarding me for Ruthita, "I was about to h'arsk your ladyship, whether I should get tea ready."

Ruthita took her by the hand. "You didn't talk to me that way once, Hetty. I'm just Ruthie to you always, and Sir Dante is plain Dannie."

She looked up and met the laughing reproach in our eyes. Her apron went to her face and her bodice commenced to quiver. "Little did I think when I washed and dressed yer little bodies that I should ever see this day," she sobbed. "It's breakin' me 'eart, that's what it is, all this quarrelin'. Why shouldn't I speak to 'im if I wants ter? Why shouldn't 'e kiss 'is own sister if he likes? Wot's it matter if all the neighbors was lookin'? There's too little lovin' and too little kissin'; that's wot I say. 'Tain't right ter be ashamed o' bein' nateral. If it 'adn't 'a' been for bein' afraid and ashamed, I might 'a' married John. The nus-girl next door got 'im. There's allaws been someone a-lookin' when I was courtin'—there's been too little kissin' in my life, and it's yer Pa's fault, if I do say it, wi' 'is everlastin' look of 'Don't yer do it.'"

"If it's as bad as all that, Hetty, I'm sure you won't mind if I——" She made an emotional armful, but between struggling and giggling she allowed me.

We had tea together in the formal dining-room, with its heavy furniture and snug red walls. We made Hetty sit beside us; she protested and was scandalized, but we wouldn't let her wait. As we talked, the old freedom of happiness came back to Ruthita's laughter. The mask of enforced prejudices lifted from Hetty's face. All our conversation was of the past—our adventures, childish mutinies, and punishments. We told Hetty what a tyrant she

had been to us. We asked her whether her nightgowns were still of gray flannel. I accused her of being the start of all my naughtiness in the explanation she had given me of how marriages were concocted. It was like putting a wilted flower into water to see the way she picked up and freshened. When she had nothing else to reply, she wagged her head at us, exclaiming, "Oh, my h'eye—what goin's on! It's a good thing walls ain't got ears. What would your poor Pa say?"

We left her and wandered through the rooms together. We only opened the study-door; we did not enter. It had always, even when we had been invited, seemed to have been closed against us. Books lay on the desk, dust-covered. It was allowed to be tidied only in my father's presence. We both felt that he must know of our trespassing, even though we could not see him. I had the uncanny feeling that he was still there at the table writing; any moment he might glance up, having completed his sentence, and I should hear his voice. Not until we had climbed the stairs did we rid ourselves of the shadow of his disapproval. In the old days when we were romping, we had been accustomed to hear his dreaded door open and his stern voice calling, "Children! Children! What d'you think you're doing? Not so much noise." It was something of this kind we were now expecting and with the same sensations of trembling.

The house was memory-haunted. Following our footsteps, yet so discreetly that we never caught them, were a witch-faced girl and a sturdy boy. Where pools of sunlight lay upon the floor we lost them; when we turned into dark passages, again they followed. On entering rooms, we half expected to find them occupied with their playing; when the budding creeper stirred against the walls, it was as though they whispered. They were always somewhere where we were not—either in the room we had just left, or the room to which we were going.

We entered what had been my bedroom. The sun was westering, playing hide-and-seek behind crooked chimney-

pots. Below us the garden lay in shadow, cool and cloistered.

Kneeling beside the window, with our elbows on the sill, not watching one another's eyes, we whispered by fits and starts, leaving our sentences unended. Most of what we said commenced with "Do you remember?" and drifted off into silence as the picture formed. It was like flinging pebbles into a pond and watching the circles spreading. One after another memories came and departed—all that we had done together and been to one another in that conspiracy of childhood. There was the pink muffler she had made me, the guinea-pig about which I had lied to her, the tragic departures and wild homecomings of school-days, and the week when the Bantam had declared his love for her. And there were memories which preceded her knowledge—my quest for the magic carpet. How I wished I might yet find it; I would fly by night to her window and carry her off, re-visiting old happinesses while Lord Halloway lay snoring.

I don't know how we came to it—I suppose we must have been speaking about Vi. Presently Ruthita said, "You could only love golden hair, could you, Dannie?"

I didn't know what she was driving at; her voice shook and her face was flushing.

"Dark-haired girls never had any chance with you, did they? You told me that long ago, after Fiesole. I remembered because—because——"

"I was a boy then, and was clumsy."

"But you spoke the truth, though you did say that for sisters black hair was the prettiest in the world. It hurt because at that time I fancied—you can guess what."

"You never showed it."

"You never looked for it—never asked for it."

I knew to what she referred. It was on the night of my sudden return from the Red House because the Spuffler had lost our money. I was sitting at this window as I was now sitting. A tap at the door had startled me; then a timid voice had said, "It's only Ruthita." She

had crept in noiselessly as a shadow. Her dear arms went about my neck, drawing down my face. "Oh, Dannie, I'm so sorry," she had whispered; "I've never missed welcoming you home ever since you went to school." She had nestled against me in the dark, her face looking frailer and purer than ever. She had slipped on a long blue dressing-gown, I remember, and her black hair hung about her shoulders like a cloud. Just below the edge of the gown her pale feet twinkled. I noticed that a physical change had come over her. Then I had realized for the first time that she was different as I was different—we were no longer children. I had fallen to wondering whether the same wistful imaginings, exquisite and alluring, had come to her. With an overwhelming reverence, I had become aware of the strange fascination of her appealing beauty. In the confessing that followed I had told her of my jilting by Fiesole, and had spoken those stupid words about loving only golden hair. How wounding I had been in my boyish egotism! And that was not the last time I had wounded her in my blindness.

Scene after scene came back to me—into each I read a new meaning in the light of what she had told me: the Snow Lady's hints before I sailed for America; Ruthita's appeal for my protection against Halloway, and her sudden acceptance of him directly she heard that I was with Vi at Sheba.

"Ruthie, all this was very long ago; so many things have happened since then, there can be no harm in talking about it. You wanted me right up to the last—and I was too selfish to know it."

"Right up to the last," she whispered, and I knew she meant right up to now.

"And this—and this is what your husband has guessed?"

She took my hands in both her own, speaking with quiet dignity. "I had to tell you. Perhaps I too have been selfish, but I couldn't let you misunderstand me any longer. I've seen you watching for me, and I've had to go by you without looking. We never had any secrets, you and I;

you must have wondered why I let my husband make me cut you—I've been wicked—I couldn't trust myself. When I heard that you'd gone to Sheba, I didn't care what happened. I'd always hoped and hoped that you might come to love me. But it seemed I wasn't wanted, so I just took—— He's been good to me, but it isn't like living with the person you love best, is it? You mustn't hate him any more; to love a woman who can't love you back again makes even success empty—and he's been used to take love without asking."

We sat very still. We saw Hetty come out into the garden and walk down the path as though she were looking for us. We waited to hear her call, but she re-entered the house, leaving the silence unruffled.

"I've made a pretty fair mess of things, haven't I? There was Vi first, and now there's you. I'm a pretty fair blighter."

She pressed herself against me to stop me. "Oh, you mustn't say that. It hurts. You mustn't say it."

"But I am. Even your husband knows it."

"Some day you'll marry and everything'll come right."

"For Vi, if we have the luck to come together. But what about you? What about even Halloway?"

She avoided answering my self-accusations by attracting attention to herself. "From the first he didn't want me to know you; he gave excuses, and I understood. Because I couldn't give him love, I gave him everything else that he wanted. But now—now that I'm going to be a mother, I had to tell you. I want it to be a boy, Dannie. Waiting for him, I've thought so much of old days. I felt that if you didn't know, somehow, things wouldn't go right—because when he comes I want him to be like you."

She had risen, letting go my hand.

"I had always thought of you as my sister," I faltered.

"I know—and you were a dear brother. It was just my foolishness to want you to be something else."

For a moment she clung to me, hiding her face against

my shoulder. Then we passed down the stairs, afraid to be alone any longer.

"Goin'?" Hetty inquired. "You won't tell the master, will yer?" She glanced toward the study-door as though he were behind it and might have overheard.

At the end of the lane the carriage was standing. In the presence of the coachman Ruthita's tones were conventional. "You're going westwards? Where can I drop you?"

In the carriage I asked her whether her husband would know of what we had done.

"I shall tell him."

"Don't you think he might be willing to let us be friends?"

"I'll ask him," she said, "but——"

At Hyde Park Corner the carriage pulled up and I alighted. I watched her eager face looking back at me, growing smaller and smaller.

Wandering aimlessly through the parks, I sat for a time by the Serpentine. The nerves of all that had happened in the past five years were cut. If I had married Ruthita, would she have been happy? The thought of marrying her was just as impossible to me now as it had been when Grandmother Cardover had mentioned it at Ransby. And yet, at a time when I had been most sensitive of injustice, I had been unjust to her—— And now she was going to be a mother—little Ruthita, who seemed to me herself so much a child!

When I came into Whitehall, the pale twilight of spring still hovered above house-tops; from streets the flare of London steamed up. The opal of the sky reflected the marigold-yellow of illumined windows; arc-lights, like ox-eye daisies, stared above the grass of the dusk.

I made my way to my club and sank into a chair, aimlessly skimming the papers, reading scarcely a line. Few people were about; the room was empty save for one other loiterer. Spring in the streets was calling.

The man strolled up to me, holding an illustrated weekly in his hand. I knew him slightly and nodded.

"Writing a book on the Renaissance, ar'n't you? Here's something a bit in your line. Funny how Paris'll go mad over a thing like that!" He smacked the page. "Girl comes from nowhere. Her lover writes a play—that's the story. There's a mystery. The play's difficult to understand, so it must be brainy. Now I like a thing that don't need no explanation: Marie Lloyd, the Empire, musical comedy—that's my cut."

He tossed me the weekly and turned on his heel to walk out. Annoyed at being disturbed, I glanced down irritably.

From a full-page illustration the face of Fiesole smiled up.

CHAPTER V

LA FIESOLE

It was ridiculous this curiosity, but I knew how to explain it—it grew out of my life's great emptiness since I had listened to Ruthita's confession. She had made me realize as never before how I had muddled my chances of happiness. I had heard nothing from Vi in all these years and now I had learnt that, without knowing it, I might have had Ruthita. My interests had lost their charm; I wanted an excuse to leave my work. This matter of Fiesole had cropped up, so here I was on my way to Paris, more for the sake of something to do than anything else.

I had not the remotest intention of renewing her acquaintance. Unseen by her, I would watch her from some corner of the theatre, and then slip back to London. There would be piquancy in the thought that I had gone to see her for old time's sake, and that she would never know about it. As for speaking to her, that would be an insult after what had happened at Venice. Probably she hated me. She ought to, if she did not.

Though I smiled at myself, truth to tell, I was rather pleased to find I could still be so impulsive; romance in me was not dead after all these years of uneventful waiting. This journey was the folly of a sentimental boy—not the cynical act of a man of the world.

La Fiesole! La Fiesole! Since she had stared out at me from the printed page I was continually coming across her. Everyone was discussing her; she had sprung out of nowhere into notoriety. Greater than Bernhardt, men said of her: a spontaneous emotional actress of the first rank—the sensation of the moment.

France took her seriously; England quoted French eulogies in italics. Fantastic legends were woven about her name, made plausible by an occasional touch of accuracy.

Antoine Georges had written the play—it was based on the *amours* of Lucrezia Borgia. It was said that he was La Fiesole's lover, that she had given him the plot—that she had even helped him write it; some went so far as to say that it was founded on an incident in her own past life, transposed into a fifteenth century setting. Antoine Georges denied that he was her lover; but the world smiled skeptically—it liked to believe he was. One story asserted that she had been a *fille de joie* when he came across her; another, with that French instinct for the theatric, that he had reclaimed her from a low café in Cherbourg in which she danced. Nothing was too incredible in the face of her incredible success. One fact alone was undisputed—that she was the daughter of the famous Italian actor, many years dead, Signore Cortona.

This confirmed what I already knew about her. I remembered how she had told me in Oxford of her early stage career, which she had abandoned to go traveling. I recalled how she had said, "I'm an amateur at living—always chopping and changing. I'll find what I want some day."—— So she had found it!

In the English press she was made a peg on which to hang a whole wardrobe of side-issue and prejudice. The decency of the French stage was discussed. The question was introduced as to whether such a play would be allowed to be performed in London. The superiority of English morals was the topic of some articles; of others, the brutal prudery by which British art was stifled. A fine opportunity was afforded and welcomed for slinging mud at the censor. The discussion was given academic sanction when Andrew Lang patted it on the head in an ingeniously discursive monologue on the anachronisms of playwrights, in which he made clear that Monsieur Georges's tragedy was riddled with historic falsity.

It was nearing five when we steamed into the Gare du

Nord. My first journey to Paris had been prompted by Fiesole. Then I was escaping from her; now I was going to her. For old time's sake I made my headquarters at the hotel at which I had then stayed in the Rue St. Honoré. After *diner* I set out through thronged streets to book a seat at the theatre. Upon making my request at the office, the man shrugged his shoulders and turned away with the inimitable insolence of French manners. It was as though he had said, "You must be mad, or extremely bourgeois." I had affronted him personally, the theatre-management, La Fiesole and last, but not least, the infallible intelligence of Paris. Did Monsieur not know that La Fiesole was the rage, the fashion? Every seat was taken—taken weeks ahead.

My second request was apologetic and explanatory: I honored La Fiesole so much that I had journeyed from London on purpose to see her. What was the earliest date at which he could make it possible? He directed me to an agency which had bought up all the best seats in the house; here I secured a box at an extortionate price for five nights later.

In the intervening days I was frequently tempted to abandon my project and return. It seemed the height of foolishness to squander five days in order that I might court disappointment. She must have altered—might have deteriorated. It was just possible there was a grain of truth in the wild stories that circulated about her. And yet— There were memories that came to me full of nobility and gentleness: windswept days at Oxford; a night at Ferrara; days and nights on the lapping lagoons of Venice. I wanted to see her again—and I did not. I blew hot and cold. And while I hesitated, spring raced through the streets of Paris with tossing arms and reckless laughter.

When I entered the theatre it was already packed. The audience seemed conscious that it had assembled for a great occasion; it had dressed for its share in the undertaking. Gowns of marvelous cut and audacity were in

evidence. The atmosphere was heavy with the perfume of exotic femininity and flowers.

My box was on the right-hand side, just above and next to the stage. Below me was a nodding sea of plumed head-dresses, naked shoulders, and gleaming bosoms; rising tier on tier to the gold-domed roof, was a wall of eyes and fluttering white faces. Everything was provocative of expectancy. Gods and goddesses, carved on the columns and painted on the curtain, alone were immobile.

A quick succession of taps sounded, followed by three long raps. The theatre was plunged in shadow. As though a crowd drew away into the distance, the last murmur spent itself. The curtain quivered, then rose reluctantly on the illusion which had brought the unrelated lives of so vast an audience together.

We saw an Italian garden, basking in sunlight and languorous with summer. Beneath the black shade of cypress-trees stretched marble terraces, mounting up a hillside, up and up, till they hung gleaming like white birds half-hidden in the velvet foliage. In the foreground a fountain splashed. A little way distant the Pope Alexander lolled, toying with his mistress, Giulia. Up and down pathways lined with statues, groups of courtiers wandered: youths in parti-colored hose and slashed doublets; girls, vividly attired, exquisitely young, engaged in the game of love. Guitars tinkled and masses of bloom flared stridently in the sun. Sitting by the fountain was the Madonna Lucrezia and the young Lord of Pesaro. Her face was turned from us; we could only see her vase-like figure and the way she shook her head in answer to all he offered.

The envoy from Naples enters and with him the Duke of Biseglia; he urges the Pope for a last time to make an alliance with his country by betrothing the Madonna Lucrezia to the Duke. But the Pope does not want the alliance; he is joining with Ludovico of Milan against Naples and war will result. While the Pope is refusing, for the first time Lucrezia looks up and her face is turned towards us—the face I had known in my boyhood, inno-

cently girlish, fresh as a flower, so ardent and beautiful with longing that the theatre caught its breath at sight of it and a muffled "Ah!" swept through the audience.

As though attracted by a power which is outside herself, she rises, hesitating between shyness and daring, and steals to where the young Duke is sullenly standing. She takes his hand and presses it against her breast. He snatches it from her. She commences to speak, at first haltingly, but with gathering passion. Her voice is hoarse and sultry, like that of a Jewess; it is a voice shaken with emotion, which now caresses and now tears at the heart. The drone of merriment in the garden and the tinkling of the guitars is hushed. Listless lovers come out from the shadows and gather about her, amused by her earnestness. She pleads with the Pope, her father, to give her the Duke—not to send him away from her. Biseglia interrupts haughtily, asserting that he only desired her for State reasons and that since the Pope refuses Naples' friendship, he would not marry the Madonna Lucrezia though her father were to allow it.

Alexander laughs boisterously at this quarrel of children and like a huge Silenus wanders off into the garden, leaning on his mistress, Giulia, followed by his train of minstrels and dilettantes. Their singing grows more faint as they mount the terraces towards the palace.

Lucrezia watches them depart with a face frozen with despair. As Biseglia turns to go, she darts after him and drags him back, fawning on him, abasing herself, offering herself to him, telling him that whatever comes of it she cannot live without him. He regards her in silence; then falls to smiling and flings her from him, reminding her that she is the Pope's bastard. At that the boy Lord of Pesaro, who has watched everything from the fountain, runs with drawn sword to her defense. But she springs between them, saying that when the time comes to kill Biseglia, she will take revenge in her own way like a Borgia. The great Pope, looking back, has seen her awakened savagery and laughs uproariously. The scene ends

with the garden empty and Lucrezia stretched out on the ground, kissing the spot which Biseglia's feet have touched and weeping in a frenzy of abandon, while the Lord of Pesaro looks on impotent and broken-hearted.

Between the first act and the second the French have invaded Italy, so the Pope and the King of Naples have found a common enemy and a common need for alliance. The Duke of Biseglia has again been sent to Rome to sue for the hand of Lucrezia. But in the meanwhile she has been betrothed to the Lord of Pesaro, and, to prevent him from joining with the French when Lucrezia is taken from him, his removal has been planned.

The curtain goes up on a night of bacchanalian riot in the Papal gardens. Beneath trees a costly table has been spread, at which sit men and women attired in every kind of extravagance, as animals, pagan deities, and mythological monstrosities. In the branches overhead are set sconces and blazing torches. Distantly over white terraces and pathways the moon is rising. In the foreground are mummers and tumblers. The servitors who pass up and down the company are humpbacks, dwarfs, Ethiopians, and dancing-girls.

In the center of the table sits the Pope, and next to him Lucrezia, and next to her Biseglia. Opposite to Biseglia is seated the Lord of Pesaro, and next to him a woman in a mask. With the heat of the wine and the lateness of the hour the women lie back in their lovers' arms—all except the masked woman and the Madonna Lucrezia. Lucrezia sits erect like a frightened child, the one pure thing in the freedom that surrounds her. Biseglia pays her no attention, and from across the table the Lord of Pesaro watches.

The Pope twits Biseglia on his coldness, saying, "Think you that my daughter hath a deformity?" And Biseglia gives the irritable answer, "Can a man love a woman while that young spit-fire glowers green envy at him opposite?"

Pesaro leaps to his feet, but the Pope, as though to pacify him, pledges him and hands the goblet to the masked

woman to offer to him. Still standing uncertain, Pesaro receives it from her. Raising it slowly, his lips touch the brim; he clutches at his throat, upsetting the cup so that the red stain flows towards Lucrezia. He leans out, gazes in her eyes, and crashes across the table, twisting as he falls, still looking up at her.

The silence that follows is broken by a low rippling laugh. The company gaze in astonishment; it is Lucrezia who is laughing. The child in her face is dead; her expression is inscrutable, wicked and sirenish. She sways towards Biseglia, bending back her head and twining her arms about him. "Hath the Pope's daughter a deformity that thou canst not love her? Behold, thou shalt judge. She will dance and dance, till she dances thee into rapture and thy soul is poured out upon her."

From the hand of a servitor she snatches a torch and steps into the open. She commences to dance and, as she dances, unbuckles her girdle so that her gown slips from her. As the beat of the music grows more furious she unbinds her hair, so that it writhes like snakes about her firm white arms and bust. Dwarfs clamber into trees and slide out along their branches, raining rose-leaves on her as she passes. The strangely attired company forget their jaded decadence and sprawl across the table, digging their elbows into its scattered magnificence, following the gleam of her young, white body as it twists and turns beneath the whirling torch.

But her gaze is bent always on Biseglia; her eyes are aslant and beckoning. Her bosom rises and falls more fiercely with the wrenching in-take of the breath. Will he never go to her?

She flings back her hair from her shoulders; her body flashes like an unsheathed sword. Nearer and nearer to him she dances. His eyes rest on her moodily, half-closed. Does he make a movement, quickly she withdraws.

She has flung away her torch and is spinning madly with her hands clasped behind her head. The grass is hidden with rose-leaves; she floats—her feet scarcely stir

them. Suddenly she stops; stands erect for an ecstatic moment; sways dizzily; her strength is gone. Her hands, small and pitiful, fly up to cover her eyes. She shakes her hair free to hide her. Her body crumples. She is broken with her shame and futility. Biseglia leaps the table and has her in his arms as she falls, pressing his hot lips against hers. With clenched fists she smites him from her, slips from his embrace, and runs shimmering like a white doe through the forest of blackness.

With a shout the revelers shatter the banquet and pour in pursuit of her. Biseglia leads them, darting ahead into the shadows. Dancing and singing, the disheveled bacchanalians stagger across the dark, trouping along dusky terraces with twining arms, following the fleeing dryad.

Torches are burnt out and smolder in' their sockets. Night is tattered by the dawn. Amid the havoc of trampled chalices and glass sprawls the wine-stained figure of the dead Lord of Pesaro—the man who, could she have loved him, would have given her all.

La Fiesole! La Fiesole! We rose as one man as the curtain dropped. We did not care to think whether this was wrong—it was lovely. She had danced our souls out of their prejudices, out of their walls of restraint into chaos. The rapture of her beauty ran through our veins like wine. Our imaginations pursued her along pale terraces. The fragrance of crushed rose-leaves was in our nostrils and the coolness of night. Our breath came short, as though we had been running. Our senses were reeling and our eyes dazzled. We stood up in our places clutching at the air, calling and calling, hungry for the sight of her.

For myself, I was smitten with blindness. My eyes saw the striving throng through a mist and probed into the beyond, where she ran on and on palely, forever from me. I shouted to her, but she grew more distant; never once did she look back or stay her footsteps.

I was aware of a deep stillness—a hoarse peal of laughter: thousands of eyes glared up at me and down on me, and mouths gaped mockery. The mist cleared; Fiesole

was standing before the curtain. The audience had grown hushed at sight of her while I had continued calling. From the stage, twenty feet away, she was smiling at me, insolent and charming, her body still shuddering with exertion beneath the velvet cloak which lay across her shoulders. What did I care, though to-morrow the whole of Paris should laugh? She had danced my soul into ecstasy. I placed my hands on the edge of the box and leant out drunkenly, shouting her name, "*Fiesole! Fiesole!*"

She kissed her hand at me derisively, bowed to the audience, and was gone.

I sank in my place, a sickening nostalgia for her upon me. I did not reason; I only knew I wanted her—wanted her as she had once wanted me, with her hands and eyes and body. In a dim way I felt angry with myself for having lost her. She had made me disgusted with my coldness at Venice as I had watched my counterpart, the Duke of Biseglia. From the theatric torture in her face I had learnt something of how brutal a man may be when he fancies that he is righteously moral. She, whom I saw now so remotely, might have been mine; through these chilly years La Fiesole might have been my companion, had I had the faith to take what was offered. I had sought the things that were impossible. I had made a god of my scruples. I had sinned weakly, following Vi who did not belong to me. I had sat down to wait for her, and all the while Life was tapping at the door. I tasted Life to-night— And who knows? Perhaps I had broken this woman's heart. I would no longer be niggardly. I would go to her; accuse myself to her; beat down her hatred of me; carry her off.

While these thoughts trooped across my mind, the crooked sphinx-like smile of Paris wandered over me, examined me, hinted at tragedy with laughter, and widened its painted lips at my absurdity.

The curtain rustled. The warning raps sounded. Lights sank, and heads bent forward.

In a dim-lit room, chilly to the point of austerity, sat

Lucrezia. Tall candles shone upon her face—a face purged of emotion, nunlike and wooden with an expression of distant contemplation. Behind her head was an open window through which floated in the sound of music. She heeded it not at all. In the far corner stood a bed with the curtains drawn back. At an altar a lamp burnt before a shining crucifix. Her women were unrobing her for the bridal night. They spoke to her, but she did not answer. They blamed her for her indifference to Biseglia: she had never kissed him, never caressed him since the night when she had won him. Did she not know that he hungered for her kindness?

She gave them no answer. They lifted her this way and that as though she were a doll; she seemed to have forgotten her body. She might have been in a trance, leading a life separate, dreaming of things innocent and holy.

One by one the candles were extinguished; only the lamp burnt before the altar. When her women were gone, she slipped from the bed and knelt with her head bowed before the cross.

The music dies; silence falls. Along the passage comes a creeping footstep. The door opens; Biseglia enters, blinking his eyes at the room's dimness. He whispers her name. At last she hears him and rises, standing before the altar. He crosses the room reverently. He halts, gazing at her. He rushes forward, masters her, crushes her to him, and cries that she torments him—starves him.

When she makes no response, but lies pulseless in his arms, he carries her to the bed, incoherently claiming as his right the fondness she does not give him. Then he grows gentle and kneels before her, kissing her feet and calling her his god.

She speaks. Her voice is small. "Biseglia, thou didst love me only when I had made myself worthless that I might win thy fondness."

He yearns up to her with his arms, disowning his former coldness, protesting that he adores her. She leans over him sadly; he raises his lips to hers. As she kisses

him, her expression kindles to triumph. She withdraws her hand from her breast; the Borgian dagger sinks into his heart.

She gazes stonily on the man who had once refused her. The lamp before the altar flickers and goes out. The room is plunged in darkness.

CHAPTER VI

SIR GALAHAD IN MONTMARTRE

LONG after the curtain had fallen I sat on. I had seen Antoine Georges step before the footlights leading Fiesole. I had seen him alternately bend above her hand and bow his acknowledgments to the applause. I did not like him, this fat little Frenchman, with his thin beard and spindly legs. The polite proprietorship of his bearing towards her had impressed me as offensive. I felt sure that he was smacking his lips and saying, "They shall believe that it's all true, this that they say about us."

From the wings had come lackeys carrying garlands. They had built up a garden about her. The people had gone mad, standing up in their places and thunderously shouting. From all parts of the theatre flowers had rained on her. They had stormed her with flowers. Women had torn bouquets from their dresses and wreaths from their hair. It might have been a carnival; the air was dense with falling blossoms. And she had faced them with the smile of a pleased child, while Monsieur Georges bent double before her.

It was all over. Men were busy with brooms, sweeping up the litter of her triumph. This happened every night: they got used to it. Already in the *fauteuils d'orchestre* perfunctory faded women were adjusting linen coverings. The last stragglers of the audience were reluctantly going through the doors.

A man entered my box and tapped me on the shoulder. I stared up at him; his expression made me laugh. He evidently mistook me for a crank who was likely to give trouble. I reached for my hat and coat wearily; I felt that

I had been beaten all over. As I folded my scarf about my neck I made bold to ask him where I could find Fiesole. He shrugged his shoulders, darting out his hands, palms upwards, as one who said, "Ah, it is beyond me! Who can tell?"

But it was important that I should see her, I urged; I was an old friend.

An old friend! These days La Fiesole had many old friends. Were it permitted to her old friends to see her, all the messieurs would cross the footlights. He eyed me with impatience, anxious to see the last of me, his waxlike face wickedly ironic.

I produced a fifty-franc note. Would it not be possible for him to deliver her a message?

If Monsieur would write out his message he would make certain that La Fiesole got it.

So I scribbled my address on the back of a card, asking her to allow me to speak with her.

I folded the fifty-franc note about it and handed it to my tyrant. From the lack of surprise with which he accepted I gathered that he had pocketed greater amounts for a like service.

In the street I paused irresolute. From my feet, could I follow it, a path led through crowded boulevards directly to her. I could not be very distant from her; a lucky choice of direction, the chance turning of a corner might bring us face to face. That I was in her mind was probable. She was remembering, as I was remembering, that day at Lido and that night at Venice. Was she satisfied with her revenge? She had always been generous. Somewhere in this passionate white night of Paris her car sped on through illumined gulleys; she lay back on cushions, her eyes half-shut, her mouth faintly smiling, picturing the past at my expense. I liked to think that she hated me; it was in keeping with her character; I respected her for it. The women who had loved me had made things too easy; it had always been I who had done the refusing. My blood was eager for the danger of pursuing. I longed for

resistance that I might overcome her. I loved her with my body, I told myself, as I had never loved a woman; my cold, calculating intellectuality was in abeyance. That she should make my path of return difficult added a novel zest.

The human tide was drifting towards Montmartre; I fell in and followed. On the pavement before cafés at little round tables *boulevardiers* were seated, sipping their absinthe, their eyes questing for the first hint of adventure. Taxis flashed by, soaring up "the mountain" like comets, giving me glimpses as they passed of faces drawn near together, ravishing in their transient tenderness. How was it? What had happened? For the first time in my remembrance I had ceased to analyze; I had ceased to sadden my present with foreknowledge.

Far away the Place Pigalle beckoned. Up tortuous streets, between ancient houses, the traffic streamed like a fire-fly army on the march. As I neared the top I entered the pale-gold haze of its unreality. Electric signs of L'Abbaye, the Bal Tabarin, and the Rat Mort glittered on the night like paste jewels on the robe of a courtesan. Women trooped by me like blown petals, peering into my face and smiling invitation. I marked down their types in my mind by the names of flowers—jasmine, rose, poppy.

I was curiously transformed from that evening of long ago when I had watched these sights with horror, and had fled from Paris in the dawn to Florence. I felt no anger, no revulsion—only tolerance. I had finished with peeping beneath the surface. Fiesole had taught me to despise all that. *Fiesole! Fiesole!* I saw her always dancing on before me, mocking my sobriety. Yes, I told myself, she had made me kinder.

A couplet from *Sir Galahad in Montmartre* dinned in my brain and summed up my estimate of my former self:—

"He sees not the need in their faces;
'Tis the sin and the lust that he traces."

I had never looked for the need in any woman's face. I had been absorbed in contemplation of my own chastity—had hurried through life with hands in pockets, fearful lest I might be robbed. Vi's need, which I had recognized, I had made ten times more poignant. I had waited for her. What good had I done by it? I might go on waiting. Meanwhile there were Fiesole and Life knocking at my door. My constancy to Vi had become a luxury.

A girl slipped her arm in mine. "'Allo! You zink I am pretty?"

She was a *cocotte*, little more than a child, so delicate and slight. Her hair was flaxen and blowy; her complexion a transparent china-white; her dress décolleté and cut in a deep V between the breasts. She pushed her small face up to mine with the red lips parted, clinging to me with the innocent familiarity of one who had asked no more than a roguish question.

"You're pretty, but——"

"Zen we go togezer!"

"I'm afraid not."

"Pourquoi non?"

"I'm hoping to meet someone."

She released me at once with a good-natured smile. "La! La! I hopes you find 'er."

She tripped away, turning before she was lost in the crowd to wave her hand. I told myself that her flower was the jonquil.

It was one o'clock when, after wandering about, I found myself back at the same place. I could not sleep; my brain was too active with excitement. Instead of being sad because of Fiesole, I was unreasonably elated. I took a seat at a table on the pavement and ordered coffee and cognac. Every man and woman within sight was a lover, and I sat solitary. As the hour grew later men and women grew more frank in their embraces, and all with that naïve assumption of privacy which makes the Frenchman, even in his vices, seem so much a child. The sex-instinct beat about "the mountain"—the air quivered and pulsed.

Girls rustled in the shadows. Lovers, chance-met, danced home together. Strange to say, I found nothing sinful in it—only romance. I had ceased to look beyond the immediate sensation.

“Poor boy! You not find ‘er?”

I looked up; my lady of the jonquils was leaning over my shoulder.

“No.”

“Eh bien, peut-être, you find her to-morrow, *hein!* If not, zere are ozers.” She waved her small gloved hands in a circle, bringing them back to include herself. She looked a good little soul, standing there so bravely disguising her weariness.

“Tired?”

“It ees nozing.”

“Won’t you join me?”

Immediately we were in sympathy. She owned me with a playfulness which had no hint of indelicacy. Drawing off her gloves, she rested her chin on her knitted fingers and regarded me laughingly with her world-wise eyes. She was scarcely more than half my years, I suppose.

“Zere are ozers,” she repeated.

“Not for me,” I said; “not to-night.”

“Dieu! You are funny, my friend. You lofe like zat?”

The waiter hovered nearer, flirting his napkin across the marble-tables.

I beckoned; he dashed up like a hen to which I had scattered grain.

“*Crouûte au pot?*”

“*Bien, Monsieur.*”

“*Filet aux truffes.*”

“*Bien, Monsieur.*”

“*Salade romaine.*”

“*Bien, Monsieur.*”

“*Vouvray.*”

“*Bien, Monsieur.*”

I turned to her. She had corn-flower eyes like Kitty—I had been wondering of whom I was reminded. I passed

her my cigarette-case. She chose one fastidiously and tilted it between her lips with the smile of a *gamine*.

While we ate neither of us said much—she was hungry; but, as we sipped our coffee and the pile of cigarette ends grew, I found myself telling her—asking her if a man had refused her once, whether she could ever again love him.

"If he haf a great heart, oui. If he haf not——" She threw her cigarette away. "C'est la vie! Quoi?" She snapped her fingers and leant over and took my hand, this gay little Montmartroise. "But you haf; zo courage, my friend."

I did not want to be left alone; she knew it. A *fiacre*, with a battered race-horse propped between the shafts, had drawn up against the curb. On the box a red-faced *cocher* nodded. We climbed in and she nestled beside me. The *cocher* looked across his shoulder, asking where to drive. "Straight on," I told him.

We crawled away down "the mountain"; as we went, she sang contentedly just above her breath. When we reached the Madeleine the *cocher* halted, inquiring gruffly whither he should drive. "Tout droit. Tout droit"; we both cried impatiently. So again we moved slowly forward. There was no doubt in the man's mind that we were mad.

She drew closer to me and cuddled into my coat; the foolish prettiness of her dress was no protection against the chill night air. We lay back, her head resting on my shoulder, gazing up at the star-scattered sky. The asphalt surface of the boulevard, polished by petrol and rubber-tires to the dull brightness of steel, glimmered in a long line before us reflecting the arc-lamps like a smooth waterway—like a slow canal in ancient Venice.

Where we went I do not know; I did not care to notice. The creaking *fiacre* had become a gondola and it was Fiesole who leant against me. Sometimes the *cocher* drew up to light a cigarette and to glance suspiciously down upon us. Then I was brought back to reality. We circled the Bastille and prowled through the *Quartier Latin*, where the

night was not so late. We crossed the river once more and crept along the *Quai des Tuileries*; then again we climbed "the mountain" and plunged into the grimy purlieus of *Les Halles*. Market-carts were already creaking in from the country with swinging lamps. Wagons piled high with vegetables, loomed mountainous under eaves of houses. From the market came grumbling voices of men unloading, and the occasional squealing of a stallion.

The *cocher* wriggled on his box and confronted me fretfully. Before he could ask his question, "Sacré nom d'un chien!" I shouted fiercely, "Allez. Allez." Meekly he jerked at the reins, sinking his head between his obedient shoulders.

I looked down at the tiny face beside me—the face of a white flower whose petals are folding. She had ceased her singing an hour ago. Feeling me stir, she struggled to open her eyes and slipped her small hand into mine. When I drew my arm tighter about her she sighed happily.

Above the tottering roofs of Paris the night grew haggard. One by one stars were snuffed out. Wisps of clouds drove across the moon like witches riding homeward. It was the hour when even Paris grows quiet. Rag-pickers were slinking through the shadows, raking over barrels set out on the curb. Women, shuddering in bedraggled finery—queens of Montmartre once, perhaps, whose only weariness had been too many lovers—dragged themselves to some sheltered doorway, thankful for a bed in the gutter, if it were undisturbed. In boulevards for lengthy pauses ours was the only sound of traffic.

My head jerked nearer hers. Her breath was on my cheek; I could feel the twitching of her supple body. Poor little lady of the jonquils—of what was she dreaming? What had she expected from me? She would tell often of this eccentric night and no one would credit her story.

When I awoke she was still sleeping. A spring breeze ruffled the trees; sparrows were chirping; a golden morn-
ing sparkled across the waters of the Seine. The sun, still ruddy from his rising, stood magnificently young among

the chimney-pots, trailing his gleaming mantle beneath the bridges.

The battered race-horse had stumbled with us just beyond the Louvre and stood with his head sagging between his knees, his body lurching forward. The reins had fallen from the *cocher's* hands; his thick neck was deep in his collar; and his face looked strangled. From across the road a waiter scattered sand between his newly set out tables and watched us with amused curiosity.

My body was cramped. As I attempted to uncrook my legs, my companion opened her eyes and stared at me in amazed confusion. She yawned and sat up laughing, patting her mouth. "Oh, *la, la*——. Bonjour, toi!"

We examined ourselves—I in my crumpled evening-dress, and she in her flimsy gown and decorative high-heeled shoes. I had a glimpse of my face in imagination—pale and donnish; the very last face for such a situation. How ill-assorted! Then I laughed too; the *cocher* lumbered round on his box and burst into a hoarse guffaw at sight of us. We all laughed together, and the waiter ceased sanding his floor to laugh with us.

We left the racer to his well-earned rest and all three went across to the café. As we soaked bread in our bowls of coffee and plied our spoons, we chatted merrily like good comrades. Then we parted with the *cocher*, leaving him agreeably surprised, and sauntered down the Quai where workmen in blue blouses, hurrying from across the bridges, found time to nudge one another knowingly and to smile into our eyes with a glad intimacy which was not at all offensive.

In a narrow street where "the mountain" commenced, she halted and placed both her hands on my shoulders, tiptoeing against me.

"One 'as to go 'ome sometime, mon ami." She was determined to be a sportsman to the end. "But remember, mon petit, if you do not find 'er, zere are ozers."

I put my hand into my pocket. She examined what I gave her. "Mais, non!" she exclaimed, flushing.

"But yes—for remembrance."

She tilted up her face and her happy eyes clouded; the tired cheeks turned whiter and the painted lips quivered.

"Little one, keess me."

So I parted from this chance-met waif with her brave and generous heart—— And this was what my madness and Fiesole had taught me. For the time the memory of Vi was entirely banished from my thoughts.

CHAPTER VII

SATURNALIA

At my hotel I found no message. But it was still early; she might not have received my card and, as yet, did not know my address. The intoxication of the previous night still flicked my spirit into optimism—perhaps she would answer me in person.

Then came the reaction—the truer judgment. If she had desired to see me, she could have sent round word to my box at the theatre. After all, why should she desire to see me? She was famous and had made her world without me. When we parted, I had left her with a memory so humiliating that it must scorch her even now. These were things which a woman finds it difficult to forgive—impossible to forget. Still, there was curiosity—a woman's curiosity! She might resist it for a time, tantalizing both me and herself; but she would have to see me presently, if only to wound me.

I scarcely stirred from my hotel, afraid lest I should miss her. By the time evening fell, I had come to a new conclusion—that the ironical scoundrel, who had so coolly pocketed my money, had destroyed my card. To make sure of reaching her, I wrote a letter to the theatre, saying many true things foolishly. Then, in sheer restlessness, I hurried to the boulevard in which her theatre was situated, hoping to get a glimpse of her either coming or going.

I could not bring myself to enter—it was too horrible and beautiful—she was dancing away her womanhood in there. Shockingly fascinated as I had been by the spectacle, I felt a lover's jealousy that strangers should watch it.

I hated the gay crowds seething in to find enjoyment in my shame and her tragedy. They were jesters at something sacred.

I paced the boulevard with clenched hands and snapping nerves; I could not go far away from her, and I could not go to her. Within my brain she was always dancing, dancing, and the jaded eyes of Paris grew young with greed of her sensational perfection. I longed to go to her, to protect her, to save her from herself. She needed me, though she would scorn the idea if I told her. If she would but allow it, I would carry her away from these hectic nights and this subtle, soul-destroying sensualism. Her shame was my doing; I would give all my life to make amends to her.

But she gave me no sign that she had either seen or heard from me. What else could I expect? How could I explain my infatuation even to myself, let alone to her, as more than physical attraction? And was it more? . . . Once she had offered me far more than I now begged; I had churlishly refused it. How could I account to her for my altered valuation of her worth? She would not answer—I knew that now. I should have to compel her attention.

Next morning in reading the papers I came across her name frequently. She was the madcap darling of Paris; every edition contained some anecdote of *La Fiesole* and her erratic doings. One item captured my interest especially: there was a certain café in the Champs Elysées to which she went often after theatre hours. For the time being she had made it the most fashionable midnight resort in Paris.

That night, having bribed heavily for the privilege, I was seated at a table near the entrance. If she came, she could scarcely pass without seeing me. The place was an *al fresco* restaurant, gorgeously theatric. It stood in a garden, brilliantly romantic and insincere as a stage-setting. Overlooking the garden were white verandahs, creeper-covered and garish with hothouse flowers; throughout it

were scattered kiosks and bowers in which the more secret of the diners sat. The plumed trees were knit together with ropes of lights, like pearl-necklaces which had been tossed into their branches casually. In bushes and hidden among blossoms, glow-worm illuminations twinkled, like faeries kindling and extinguishing their lamps. Everything was subdued and sensuous. Fountains played and splashed. Statues glimmered. A gipsy orchestra, fierce-looking and red-coated, clashed frenzied music, which sobbed away into dreamy waltzes and elusive snatches of melody. The effect was bizarre—artistically unreal and emotionally tropic.

Here one might experience a great passion which consumed by its panting brevity; everyone seemed present for the express purpose of realizing such a passion.

At tables seated in couples were extraordinary people, dressed to play their part in a dare-devil romance. Here were men who looked like Russian Archdukes, bearded, bloodless, and insolently languid. Sitting opposite them were voluptuous women, tragically exotic, dangerously coaxing, with the melodramatic appearance of scheming nihilists. They were reckless, these costly, slant-eyed odalisques—exiles from commonplace kindness, born gamblers for the happiness they had thrown away and would never re-capture. There was the atmosphere of intrigue, of indiscreet liaison about almost every couple. They acted as though for one ecstatic moment the world was theirs. Their behavior was everything that is exaggerated, fond, undomestic, and arrogantly well-bred.

There was something lacking. As each new arrival entered, the slanted eyes of the women and the heavy eyes of the men were raised droopingly with an expression of furtive expectancy. They were a chorus assembled, waiting for the leading actor till the play should commence.

Low rippling laughter, spontaneously joyous, sounded. From the trellised entrance she emerged and halted, looking mock-bashful, taking in the effect she had created,

spurning the gravel with her golden slipper. Her gown was of dull green satin, cut audaciously low in the back and neck, and slashed from the hem to expose her slim ankle and golden stocking. She wore no jewels, but between her breasts was a yellow rose, which drifted nodding on the whiteness of her bosom as she drew her breath. Her reddish gold hair was wrapped *en bandeaux* about her small pale ears and broad pale forehead. It shone metallic; its brightness dulled and quickened as she swayed her splendid body.

At her first appearance a muttering had arisen, gathering in volume. As she lifted her head and her green eyes flashed through her long, bronze lashes, we grew silent. It was as though a tamer had entered a cage of panthers and stood cowing them with her consciousness of power. Yes, she knew what they thought of her, and guessed what they admired in her. She surveyed us with quiet contempt. I felt that behind whatever she did or said there lay hidden a timid girlishness. She was still the old Fiesole, the happy companion who could tramp through rainstorms like a man. Her brave pagan purity these half-way decadents had not tarnished; by them it was unsuspected. I watched her tall, lithe figure; the neck so small that one could span it with a hand; the firm, high bosom, proud and virginal; the straight, frank brows, and the mouth so red and sweetly drooping. Other women looked decorative and tinsel beside her natural perfection.

My throat was parched. My eyes felt scalded. I was unnerved and a-tremble. Her beauty daunted as much as it challenged. What bond still existed between us that would draw her to me? She looked so remote, so hemmed in by the new personality she had developed.

Her green eyes swept the garden, probing its secret shadows. For whom was she looking? They rested on mine, absorbed me—then fell away without recognition. I had risen in my place, with head bent forward, ready to go to her at the least sign of friendship. I remained standing and staring.

She turned to one of her companions and whispered something, at which they both laughed. He was a tall poetic-looking man, slight of hip, blue-eyed, and handsome. His hair was wavy and yellow, his face bearded, and his skin pale with excess. There were other men with her, Monsieur Georges among others; but on the poet alone she lavished her attention. She gave him her arm and came towards me with the undulating stride that I knew so well. For a second I believed she was going to acknowledge me; she went by so closely that her gown trailed across my feet and brushed my hands. It was cruelly intended. The play had opened.

The table that had been reserved for her was next to mine, partly hidden from the public gaze by bushes; as I watched, I caught glimpses of her profile, and could always hear the lazy murmur of her voice and occasionally fragments of what was said. I followed her foreign gestures, her tricks of personality—all of them adorably familiar: the way she shifted her eyebrows in listening, sunk her chin between her breasts when she was serious, and clapped her hands in excitement. She was as simple as a child—in her heart she had not altered. Even the way in which she made me suffer what she had suffered was childish. This pretending not to know me was so transparent. There were other and more subtle methods by which she could have taken her revenge.

I was not the only man who attempted to spy on her; there might have been no other woman present. Languid faces scattered throughout the garden took on a new sharpness. They turned and looked down from balconies on La Fiesole, eager to catch glimpses of her. To their women-companions men listened with a bored pretense of attention. Perhaps it was because of this, in an effort to focus interest on themselves, that the women, as by a concerted plan, became more animated.

Suddenly a girl in scarlet leapt upon a table and commenced to dance with flashing eyes and whirling skirts. I heard someone say that she was a gipsy and that her

brother was first-violinist in the orchestra. The music mounted up, wild and unrestrained; the small feet beat faster; the actions became more frenzied. She turned away from her comrade and bent back double, peering into his eyes; she flung herself from him, chaffing him with grim endearments; she feigned to become furious; then she threw herself across his knees exhausted, writhing her arms about his neck. Men eyed her with studied carelessness. She had done it before and they had applauded. They could see her any night. They could not always feast their eyes on La Fiesole.

Saturnalia broke loose. Girl after girl rose upon chair or table, or went swaying through the magic garden like a frail leaf harried by a storm. They danced singly, they danced together, going through grotesque contortions, beckoning lovers with their eyes and gestures.

And I watched Fiesole through the bushes. She was not so indifferent to me as she pretended. She was play-acting to rouse my jealousy; she was purposely scourging me into madness. I alone of the public was sufficiently near to see clearly what she was doing. She was luring her poet to recklessness, taking no notice of what was in process about her. Did I catch her eye, she looked past me without recognition. But him she enticed by her gentleness. The man was drunk with her favor and beauty. He trembled to put the thoughts of a lover into action; she challenged him with her eyes, warning him from her and beckoning him to her.

Stooping over her, so low that his lips were in her hair, he whispered; but she shook her head. She rested her hand lightly on his shoulder, as though to steady him and to soften the unkindness of her refusal. Quickly he caught it in his own and bent over it, running his lips along her fingers and up her arm's smooth curves. She looked down on him unmoved, disdainful at his breach of manners, yet superbly amorous. Clutching her hotly to him, he kissed her on the throat.

Blind anger shook me—lust for violence such as I had

never felt. Breaking into the toy arbor where they sat, I remember standing over him, dragging him backward by the collar, so that his face glared up at mine empurpled. His friends rushed forward, beating me about the head and shoulders, tearing at my hands, trying to make me release my hold.

Fiesole had risen like a fury. The table went down with a crash. Her face was deadly pale and her green eyes blazed with indignation. Her hands were clenched as if she also were about to strike me. And I was pouring out a torrent of words, telling her swiftly how I loved her and all that she had made me suffer.

Her rage died away as she listened and her expression became inscrutable. Quickly she darted back her head, laughing without happiness, mockingly. "You are very English, my friend. If you make so much noise, these messieurs will think we are married."

I caught her by the wrists, so that she backed away from me. "I wish to God we were."

"Oh, la, la, la!"

She went off into a peal of merriment, pointing her finger at me. The crowd gathered round us uncertain, asking in half-a-dozen languages what had been the provocation and what we were saying.

Her look changed. It was as though a mask had fallen. The temptress and witch were gone. I seemed to see in her melancholy eyes all the longing for tenderness and loyalty that I thought had been killed years ago in Venice.

She advanced her face to mine and stared at me timidly, as though fearful she had been mistaken.

"Take me out of this," she whispered hoarsely.

Her companions tried to intercept us, gesticulating and protesting. She brushed them aside, explaining that I was not myself and did not know what I was doing. For her sake they let me go without further molestation.

We passed out, leaving them gaping after us. I helped her into her furs and took my place beside her in the

coupé. Before we were out of earshot, the gipsy orchestra had swung into a new frenzy.

Once Vi had kept me from Fiesole; now Fiesole was taking me from Vi. And these two women who, through me, had influenced one another's destinies, had never met. They were hostile types.

CHAPTER VIII

LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI

I WAS at a loss what to say to her. Words could not bridge the gulf of more than five years that separated us. Now that anger had subsided, my genius for self-ridicule was at work. What a fool I had made of myself; how supremely silly I must appear in her eyes! It would be in all the papers to-morrow. How would she like that? Where was she taking me and why? Had she come with me simply to get me out of a public place before I committed worse violence?

I pieced together phrases of apology and explanation, but remained tongue-tied. To express the emotions that stormed in my mind all words seemed insincere and inadequate. I was not sufficiently certain of her to venture either speech or action. I was fearful lest her mood might change to one of amusement. My nerves were on edge—I dared not risk that.

Noiseless as a ghost in a dream-world, the electric coupé drifted up the dully gleaming boulevard. I leant against the padded back and watched her. She sat erect, splendidly self-possessed, her profile framed in the carriage-window with the stealthy lights of Paris slipping by for background. Now she was no more than a blurred outline; now the acetylene-lamps of a swiftly moving car flashed on her like a search-light; now the twinkling incandescence of an illumined café flung jewels in her hair; now her face rested like sculptured ivory on the velvet blackness of the night. She was immobile; even the slender fingers clasped together in her lap never stirred. Our silence had lasted so long that it had ceased to be fragile; it rose between us, a wall of ice.

We drew up against the curb. I had but a vague idea of where we were—near the Bois, I conjectured. Tall houses stood in shuttered dumbness along one side; on the other, trees shrank beneath the primrose dusk of arc-lights. She stepped out, ignoring my proffered assistance. She crossed the pavement and tapped; as the door swung back I followed her under an archway into a dim courtyard. Having mounted several flights of stairs, she tapped again. To the sleepy maid who opened she whispered hurriedly. The maid discreetly fell behind.

We passed into a room delicately furnished. The floor was heavily carpeted in red. The walls, hung with etchings and landscapes, were paneled in white. Flowers stood about in bowls and slender vases; shaded lamps gave to the room a secret aspect. In the grate a fire of coals was burning and two deep chairs stood one on either side. The atmosphere was intensely and perishably feminine; it gave me the feeling of preparedness—as though I had been expected. Through tall windows the curious night stared in upon us.

Fiesole crossed, making no sound save the silken rustle of her dress, and drew the curtains close together. She turned, looking back at me side-long, at once amused and languid. Her coldness and aloofness had vanished. The sparkle of mischief fetched the gold from the depths of her green eyes. Her body became expressive and vibrant. Then I heard her sweet hoarse voice, with its quaintly foreign intonation. It reached me tauntingly, lazy with indifference, holding me at arm's length. "Dear man, take a chair by the fire and behave yourself. Mon Dieu, but you were amusing to-night!"

She laughed softly at remembering and shook her cloak from her white shoulders. A strand of hair broke loose and fell coiling across her breast. She stepped to a mirror, turning her back on me; having twisted it into place, she remained smiling at her reflection, whistling beneath her breath.

Her gaiety cut like a lash across my mouth. I was

painfully in earnest. She was treating the situation as an incident—a jest. To me it was a supreme moment—a turning-point: on what we should say to one another would depend the entire direction of both our lives. I was sorry for her beyond the power of words to express. The success and luxury of her way of living did not blind me to its hollowness and danger. Her frivolity left me affronted and fascinated. She roused in me all the unrestraint of the flesh; and yet I desired to worship her with my mind. I longed to carry her away from the fever and glare of streets to a place of quiet, where the world was blowy—where she might become what she had once been when I might have had her, genuine and fine. While these thoughts raced through my mind, the insistent question kept repeating itself, why had she brought me here to be alone with her at this late hour of the night?

Her eyes flashed out at me maddeningly from the mirror. They prompted to irretrievable folly. They called me to go to her, and to be unworthy of both her and myself. And I knew why: she wished me to say and do the things that were unforgivable that she might have excuse to scorn me, to fling me from her. Once it had been my puritanism that had thrust us apart; it should not now be my sensualism. I would not let her make a hypocrite of me in my own eyes.

The seconds ticked out the silence. Her dress whispered. Her voluptuous white arms, uplifted and curved above her neck as she patted her hair, enhanced the perfect vase-like effect of her body. I would not go to her, I told myself; I would not go to her. I held myself rigid, distraught, and tense. The blood swelled out my throat and beat in my temples. She withdrew her hands. Wickedly, like a shower of largesse, the clustered glory of her hair rained from her head, catching her in a net of smoldering brightness.

She glanced with half-closed eyes across her shoulder and feigned astonishment at observing that I had remained standing.

"Still the same old idjut! Wanting something you're afraid to have, and looking tragic."

"Fiesole, girl, don't you understand? It's not that."

My voice sounded odd and strangled. I had spoken scarcely above a whisper.

She swung about and surveyed me leisurely. There was a pout on her mouth like that of a naughty child. "You're no longer amusing," she faltered; "you grow tiresome. Why can't you be sensible, and sit down? I want to hear all this that you've got to tell me."

"You don't make it easy."

She shrugged her gleaming shoulders. "Why should I? You made a horrid row about something that was none of your concern. You nearly choked a friend of mine to death. You don't expect me to say thank you, surely? I ought to punish you; instead, I bring you here. I wanted to have a look at you. Ah! but you were funny—so righteous and English! You made me laugh. . . . I can forgive anyone who does that."

When I did not answer, she regarded me puzzled. Slowly her brilliant deviltry and merriment faded. The laughter sank to a whisper and ceased abruptly, frightened at itself. The red lips drooped and parted. Something of my own pinched earnestness was reflected in her expression—it was as though her soul unveiled itself. She stole across to me wonderingly, her beautiful arms stretched out. She rested the tips of her fingers tremulously on my shoulders.

"No, that's not true. You were splendid—so different from the rest. I'm a beast. You made me ashamed of myself. That's why I was angry; because you, who made me what I am, should accuse me."

"Accuse you! God forbid!"

I made a movement to gather her to me, but she slipped past me and sank into a chair.

"Between us not that." She caught her breath. "I hate you. I want to hate you. What else did you expect? But I can't. I cannot. You won't let me."

"You ought to hate me. Call me what you like; it won't be worse than I deserve. I was cruel and selfish. I see it now."

She shook back her hair from her forehead and bent forward gazing into the fire, her elbows on her knees, her face cushioned in her hands. A sudden gravity and wistfulness had fallen on her. She was thinking, remembering, weighing me in the balance. I must not touch her—must not speak to her. If I showed any sign of passion, she would mistake it for pity either of her or of myself.

"I wanted to forget—to live you out of my life; but you've brought it all back—the old bitterness and heart-ache. You didn't know what you did to me, Dante. You spared my body; you killed everything—everything else that was best. Look at me now." She glanced down at the exotic daring of her appearance—the golden stocking that was revealed from ankle to knee by the narrow slash in the skirt; the splendid extravagant display of arms, throat, and breast that swelled up riotously, uninterrupted, snowy and amorous from the sheathlike dress—a flashing blade half-withdrawn from its scabbard.

"I'm a devil. You made me that, you virgin man. No, don't speak—I thought I should have died of shame after I left you. I could have killed you. You don't know how a woman feels when she's wanted a man with her whole soul and body, and she knows that she's beautiful; and he's flung her from him when she's offered herself, as though she were worthless. 'He didn't care,' I said, 'so nobody'll ever care.'— And then I met Antoine Georges, who had known my father. And I did what you've seen and I've won success. When I saw you the other night I wanted to make you suffer. I've often pictured how I would torture you if ever you should come back—how I'd destroy you—how I'd make you go through the same hell. And now you've come, and I can't do it.— I may change my mind presently. You'd better go while I let you."

"I'm never going."

She turned her head, scrutinizing my face stealthily from between her hands.

"Don't be a fool. What about her?"

"There's no one else. There never will be."

She gasped. "You didn't marry her?"

The strained look in her face relaxed. She laughed softly to herself; why she laughed I could not guess. It was not the laughter which follows suspense, but the laughter of one who courts danger. It was as though she parted her hair into sheaves and glanced out crying, "I am Eve, the long desired."

Reaching over to the table she picked out a cigarette. When it was alight, she snuggled down into the chair, kicking off her little gold shoes and resting her feet on the fender. She eyed me dreamily.

"Then you made me suffer all that for nothing? You good men can be cruel.— Tell me."

Briefly I told her of my useless visit to Sheba; and why I left; and why I was still unmarried. I kept nothing back in my self-scorn and desire to be honest.

She slipped her feet up and down the gleaming rail as she listened, lying deep in cushions, her cigarette tilted in her mouth, her hands clasped behind her head. When I ended, she frowned at me whimsically from beneath her drawn brows.

"But, you impracticable person, you might have foreseen all that. You didn't need to cross the Atlantic to discover that a husband doesn't let his wife be taken from him without making trouble.— So you wouldn't pay the price to get her! You're a rotten reckoner, old boy, for a man who counts the cost of everything ahead."

Her eye-lids flickered as her deep voice droned the words out.

"You should put all that in the past tense, Fiesole. I'm not counting anything to-night, penalties or pleasures. I'm just a man who's wakened. I want something madly. Whatever it costs me or anybody else, I intend to get it."

"You always wanted what you couldn't have."

She spoke lazily, blowing smoke-rings into the air, following them with her eyes and watching how they broke before they reached the ceiling. She appeared untouched by my emotion, as though nothing had been said that intimately concerned herself. She let her gaze wander, extending her lithe sweet length luxuriously, as though she had nothing to fear from my passion. I was crazed with desire, for all that I kept my tones quiet and steady. She maddened me with her indifference. It was all pretense—I knew it. She was playing a part with me, courting the inevitable, tempting me to reveal my hidden self. I watched her with clenched hands—suffering, yet finding fierce joy in the wonderful pride of her body. I would not have had her otherwise; the colder she appeared, the more I coveted her. I could have had her once for my wife, I reflected, had I chosen. I had tormented her; it was just that I should suffer.

The reticence of years fell away from me. I was kneeling at her side, kissing her unshod feet, her hands, her hair. Words tumbled from my lips, broken and unconsidered. I called her by foolish names such as are only used between lovers. I poured my heart out, speaking of the past and the future. I cursed myself, all the time repeating how I worshiped her—how I had loved her from a boy, but had come to know it only now.

And she gave no sign of response: neither forbidding, nor assenting; letting me have my way with her without acknowledging my presence; a quiet smile playing round her lips; as completely mistress of herself as is a statue.

I trembled into silence. She drooped forward, bending over me, just as she had done years ago in her uncle's summer-house.

"My dear, there are things that are offered only once. Five years ago I asked you for all that you are now asking. You were afraid of the price, as you were with the other woman. You refused me."

"But it's marriage I'm asking."

"Ah! Then I asked for less.— I'm sorry. You

ought to have gone when I told you. I felt that I should have to wound you."

Her gentle dignity stung me into strength. My turbulence died down. As I knelt, I flung my arms around her body and drew her to me. She struggled to draw back, but I held her so closely that my lips were almost on her mouth.

"Listen, Fiesole, I'm unfair and I mean to be unfair. I was a brute to you once when I meant only to be honorable. To-night I'm not caring what I am. You despise me—you can go on despising me, but I'll wear you out. I'll make you come to love me even against your will. You'll need me some day; I shall wait for that. I want to spend all my life for you; it's the only thing I ask of life now. Wherever you go I shall follow you."

I stopped, panting for breath. She had ceased to struggle. Her eyes were wide; her face hovered pale above me; she stared down at me powerless, yet with reckless challenge, breathing upon my mouth.

"You're a rotter to come back like this," she said hotly, "just when I was beginning to be happy. When you speak of marriage, you don't know what you're saying. You spoilt all that for me years ago at Venice. D'you think I'll ever believe again in the honor and goodness of a man? You've come too late. Five years changes people. I'm a different woman now—not at all what you imagine."

"You can be any kind of woman you choose, but you're the woman I'm going to marry."

"Then you haven't heard what people say about me?"

"And I don't care."

"They say I've had lovers."

"I don't believe them."

"What if I should tell you that I have?"

"I shouldn't believe you."

"You'd prefer to think that I'd lied to you rather than that I'd told you the truth?"

"It would make no difference. You've always loved me. You love me now. I know that you are pure."

"And you would never doubt it? Never doubt it of a woman who dances every night, as I do, before the eyes of Paris?"

"Never."

She gazed at me curiously, with tenderness and intentness. Her bosom shuddered; I saw the sob rising in her throat. When she spoke, the words came slowly; her eyes were misted over; she trembled as I clasped her.

"D'you know, I believe you're the only living man who'd be fool enough to say that?"

"I was always a fool, Fiesole."

I thought she would have kissed me, her lips came so near to mine. "But a dear fool, sometimes," she whispered hoarsely; "a fool who always comes too late or too early—but a fool to the end."

She stood up and my arms slipped down to her knees as I held her.

She laughed brokenly. "You nearly made me serious. It won't do to be serious at three o'clock in the morning."

"I won't go till you've promised. Promise," I urged.

She yawned. "I'm sleepy. You've worn me out."

"But answer me before I go."

She smiled down at me mockingly, ruffling my hair. "What a hurry he's in after all these years. Don't you ever go to bed?"

"Tell me to-night. I must know. I can't bear the suspense."

"I put up with it for five years.— Well, if you won't go home like a good boy, you won't. There's a couch over there."

She broke from me, leaving me kneeling with my arms empty. As the door opened into the room beyond I had a glimpse of the curtained bed.

I drew my chair closer to the dying fire. Behind the wall I could hear her steps moving up and down as she undressed. Now and then they paused; she was listening for the sound of my departure, uncertain, perhaps, whether I was still there. Some time had elapsed when

the door opened gently. I twisted round. Her room was in darkness. She was standing on the threshold. Her feet were bare; she was clad in a white night-robe; across each shoulder, almost to her knees, hung down the red-gold ropes of her braided hair.

"I meant what I said. I'm not going till you tell me."

Her green eyes met mine roguishly. "A persistent fool to-night," she said.

As the door was closing I threw after her, "That morning in Venice. . . . I was going to have asked you to marry me; you were gone. . . ."

Left alone with the last flame flickering in the grate, I watched the little gold shoes.

CHAPTER IX

THE GARDEN WITHOUT WALLS

THE sun was streaming in across my shoulder. Someone had pulled back the curtains. I was stiff and stupid from my cramped position. Despite the morning, the electric-lights were still burning in the room; I blinked down at myself and was astonished to find that I was in evening-dress. As I eased myself up, something dropped to the floor—the gold shoes of Fiesole.

From behind two warm arms fastened themselves about my neck, making me prisoner.

"You're up early, Dante C. You're a great, stupid juggins to sit up all night and spoil your temper, just when I want you to be more than ordinarily pleasant."

"My temper's not spoiled. Don't worry."

"I take your word for it. I've got a secret to tell you. I'm going on the spree to-day—going to be immensely happy. I want you to help. If you've any of your tiresome scruples left over, you'd best chuck 'em; or I'll find someone else."

"Bit early, isn't it, to tackle a chap? I'm too stupid to know what you mean. But I'm game. How long's this spree to last?"

"Till it ends."

"Then it'll last forever, so long as it's just you and me."

She dug the point of her chin into my shoulder. Glancing sideways, I caught the impish sparkle of her eyes and the glow of her cheeks, flushed with health and excitement.

"Perhaps you'd like to kiss me," she whispered, bringing her demure red lips on a level with my mouth.

"And now, perhaps you'd like to kiss me," I suggested.

When I attempted to rise, she restrained me. "Not till I've made my bargain and you've agreed to my terms. I haven't made up my mind about you, so you needn't start talking marriage. Don't know what I'm going to do with you, Dannie. So you're to come with me wherever I choose till I'm tired—and you're to ask no questions. Understand?"

"You never will be tired. I'm coming with you always."

"And you'll ask no questions?"

"No more than I can help."

She released me. I stood up and surveyed my crumpled shirt-front; I was so obviously a reveler who had outstayed discretion. She went off into peals of laughter, laughing all over, showing her small white teeth, and clapping her hands. "What have I done to you? You're a bottle of champagne; I've pulled the cork out. I'll never get you all back."

I took her hands in mine, folding them together, and drew her to me. "You'll never get any of me back. You've made me love you. That's what you've done, you adorable witch-woman."

"Oh, la, la! Don't talk like that."

"Can't help it. Don't want to help it. You've made me mad."

"Poor old Dannie! Horrid of me, wasn't it?"

A tap at the door; the maid entered, bringing in rolls and coffee. I started away from Fiesole, but she held me. "You can't shock Marie; she's hardened; she's heard all about you, and some pretty bad things she's heard."

Over her coffee she grew thoughtful.

"What's the matter?"

"You are."

"Already?"

"How can I walk through Paris with a man in evening dress at ten in the morning?"

"How d'you want me dressed?"

"In something gay. Light tweeds, brown shoes, and a gray felt hat."

"Got 'em all at my hotel. I'll slip back."

She slanted her eyes at me. "Slip back to London, perhaps! No, Dannie, I don't trust you yet. I don't intend to lose you."

She rose from the table and vanished into her bedroom. Marie followed. Through the partly closed door the excited titter of their whispered conversation reached me, scraps of nervously spoken French, and the opening and shutting of drawers and cupboards.

When she re-appeared she was clad in a mole-colored suit of corduroy velvet, gathered in at the waist and close-fitting to her modish figure. The tube-skirt hung short to her ankles and was trimmed about with fur. The suede shoes, open-work stockings, and large muff were to match. Nestling close to her auburn hair was a huzzar cap of ermine. She halted in the sunlight, eyeing me with the naughty modesty of a coquette. She looked oddly young and distinguished on this rare spring morning. There never was such a woman for arranging her temperament to suit her dress. Her hectic manner of high spirits was abandoned; she seemed almost shy as she raised her muff to her lips and watched me, while I took in the effect.

"So I meet with your approval?"

Passing down the stairs, she hugged my arm impulsively—a trick which brought memories of Ruthita. "It's awfully jolly to be loved—don't you think so?"

Before the door a powerful two-seated car was standing. The chauffeur stepped out; Fiesole took his place at the wheel. As we drove down the boulevards she was recognized; people on the pavements paused to gaze back; men raised their hats and threw glances of inquiry at one another as to the identity of her strangely attired companion. We drew up at my hotel in the Rue St. Honoré.

"I give you fifteen minutes. Is that sufficient? Make yourself gay. Don't forget, a tweed suit, brown shoes, a gray felt hat—oh, and a red tie if you've got one. I couldn't endure anything black."

I found her with her eager face turned towards the doorway, watching impatiently for me.

"A good beginning—ready to the second. Jump in. We're off to somewhere where no one'll know anything about us. Let's see if we can't lose ourselves."

She swung the car round and away we snorted, through the Place de la Concorde blanched in sunlight, up the Champs Elysées where sunlight spattered against blossoming trees and lay in pools on the turf. The streets were animated with little children, women in bright dresses, dashing cars and carriages. Paris gleamed white and green and golden. Overhead the sky foamed and bubbled, yawning into blue and primrose gulleys, trampled by stampeding clouds.

At the Place de l'Etoile the car drew up sharply and skidded; circled like a hound picking up the scent; then darted swiftly away to the Bois, where fashionables already loitered and acacias trembled murmuringly.

Fiesole was radiant with impatience. A goddess of speed, she bent above the wheel, casting her eyes along the road ahead. Did a gap occur in the traffic, she flung the car forward, driving recklessly, yet always with calculated precision. I marveled at her nerve and the silent power that lay hidden in her thin, fine hands.

As we shot the bridge at St. Cloud the pace quickened. It was as though she shook Paris from her skirts and ran panting to meet wider stretches of wind-bleached country. I had one vivid glimpse of the ribbon of blue river, boat-dotted, winding through young green of woodlands; then cities and sophistication, and all things save Fiesole, myself, and the future were at an end.

Soon the white road curved uninterrupted before us, a streak between pollarded trees and blown meadows. Over the horizon came bounding hills and church-spires, villages and rivers; as they came near to us they halted, like shy deer, for a second; when we drew level, they fled. It was as though we were stationary and the world was rushing past us.

The wind of our going brought color to her cheeks and fluttered out her hair. Her eyes were starry, fixed on the distance as she skirted the rim of eternity in her daring. Should an axle break or a tire burst, all this fire of youth would be extinguished forever. I glanced at the speedometer; it quivered from seventy to eighty, to eighty-five kilometers, and there it hovered.

The throb of the engine seemed the throb of my passion. We were traveling too fast for talking. She did not want to talk; she was escaping from something, memories, perhaps—hers and mine. In her modern way she was expressing what I had always felt: the tedium of captivity, sameness, and disappointment—the need for the unwallled garden, where barriers of obedience and duty are broken down.

At Evreux we halted for petrol. I proposed déjeuner, she shook her head naughtily.

"Where are we going?"

"Over there, to the West."

"Any particular spot in the West?"

"You'll see presently."

"How about the theatre?"

"Time enough," she said.

She spoke breathlessly, remaining at the wheel while the man was filling the tank. Somehow it seemed to me that the town had come between us; we understood one another better when the garden of the world was flying past us.

Before the man was paid, she had turned on the power. As we lunged forward, he jumped aside and I flung the money out. Our wild ride towards the Eden of the forbidden future recommenced.

Presently, without turning her head, she broke the silence. "Slip your arm round me, old boy; my back grows tired."

I placed my arm about the slender, upright figure and slid my shoulder behind her, so she leant against me.

"What's the idea, Fiesole? Paolo and Francesca?"

"And Adam and Eve, if you like; and Dan Leno and Herbert Campbell; and Joseph Parker and Jane Cakebread. Anything, so long as we keep going."

When I attempted to speak again, she turned on more power and threw me a smile which was a threat.

I clasped her closer. "Little devil! I'll keep quiet. You needn't do that."

But though I kept quiet my heart beat madly. The panorama of change sweeping by, with her face the one thing constant, quickened and emphasized my need of her more than any spoken tenderness. Our thoughts merged and interchanged with a subtlety that speech could never have accomplished. The pressure of her body, the tantalizing joy of her nearness and forbiddenness, the imminence of death, the law of silence—these summed up in a moment's experience the entire philosophy of love, and of life itself.

I began to understand her meaning, her language; she was temporizing as I had temporized at Venice; but instead of going away from me, she was fleeing with me from circumstance. She was telling me of her woman's pride—her difficulty to make herself attainable after what had happened. She loved me and she hated me. She drew me to her and she thrust me from her. She could not forget and she dreaded to remember. And she said all this when, in escaping, she took me with her.

Now I saw nothing of the hurrying landscape; I watched her. I wrote all her beauty on the tablets of my mind—nothing should be unremembered: the way her curls crept from under her cap and fluttered about her temples; the clear pallor of her forehead; the firm, broad brows; the quiet challenge of her deep-lashed eyes; how her red mouth pouted and her head leant forward from her frail white neck, like a flower from its stalk, in a kind of listening expectancy. And I observed the tender swelling of her breasts, high and proud, yet humble for maternity; and the pliant strength of her supple body; and her long clean limbs; and the delicately modeled feet and ankles, which

shot out from beneath her fur-trimmed skirt—the feet of a dancer, graceful and fragile as violins.

I was mad. I wanted her. No matter how she came to me, I wanted her. I could not bear the thought that we should ever be separated. She was so intensely mine at this present; and yet, though she was mine, I was insanely jealous to preserve her.

With the long fascination of watching her I bent slowly forward. The action was instinctive, uncalculated. How long I took in approaching her, I cannot tell. I was anxious to last out the joy of anticipation; I was not conscious of motion. My lips touched hers. Her hold on the wheel relaxed. Her eyes met mine. The car swerved, hung upon the edge of the road, ran along it balancing; then bounded back into the straight white line.

I was so frenzied that I did not care. She had thought to hold me prisoner by her speed; I would overcome her with defiance. I kissed her again, holding her to me. She kept her eyes on the distance now, but her mouth smiled tenderly.

“That was foolish,” she said.

I raised my voice to reach her above the moaning of the engine. “The whole thing’s foolish.”

She broke into wild laughter. “That’s why I like it, like you, like myself.”

We hovered on the brim of a valley; then commenced to sink as though the earth had given way beneath us. Far below, as far as eye could reach, were orchards smoking with white blossom. Through the heart of the valley a river ran; standing on its puny banks was a gray old town, blinking in the wind and sun like a spectacled grandmother who had nodded to sleep, and wakened bewildered to find spring rioting round her.

“Where is it?”

“Lisieux, unless I’m mistaken.”

“Then you know where we’re going?”

“More or less.”

We pulled up in a drowsy, sun-drenched market-place

outside a sleepy café. At tables on the pavement, with hands in their blouses and legs sprawled out, sat a few artisans, eyeing their absinthe. Houses tottered and sagged from extreme old age. Across the way a cathedral, scarred by time and chapped by weather, raised its crumbling sculptured towers against the clouds.

She took my hand as she stepped out. "You nearly did for us just now."

"Who cares?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "All Paris cares. I'm not anxious to be dead; when I am, I'd like to look pretty."

When we had seated ourselves, she took out her mirror and commenced tidying her hair and brushing the dust from her brows. There was nothing to be had, the waiter informed us, but *pot au feu*; déjeuner was over. So I ordered *pot au feu*, red wine and an omelet.

As she replaced her mirror in her muff, she looked up brilliantly. "You know, I *am* pretty."

She was being watched. The dull eyes of the absinthe-drinkers had become alert. Tradesmen had come out of their shops and stared at her across the square. Some of the bolder strolled into the café and seated themselves close to her. They were paying the unabashed homage that a Frenchman always pays to feminine beauty.

I lowered my voice to a whisper; my throat was parched with dust. "This can't go on."

She laughed with her eyes. "It can go on as long as there's any petrol left, and as long as you don't try to kiss me when I'm speeding."

"That's not what I meant; you know it."

"What then? The same old thing—marriage?"

I ignored her flippancy. "You'll be turning back directly, and when you get to Paris, you won't be like you are now. You'll be *La Fiesole* and to-night you'll be dancing with them all watching. I can't bear it."

"I shan't."

I leant eagerly forward, but she drew away from me.

"You're not going back? You've given up the theatre?"

She held me in suspense, letting her eyes wander as though she had not heard. Slowly she turned, with that lazy, taunting smile of hers. "Damn the theatre," she said quietly; "I'm going on with you to the end."

"And the end's marriage?"

"Who can tell? Now don't be a rotter. You're spoiling everything. Let's talk of something else."

When we climbed into the car, "You drive," she said.

"But to where?"

"That's my secret. Straight on. I'll tell you when to turn."

We were hardly out of the valley before her eyes had closed and her head was nodding against my shoulder. I drove gently, fearing to disturb her. From time to time I looked down at the white slant of her throat, the shadows beneath her lashes, and the almost childish droop of her mouth. How the self she kept hidden revealed itself! Her face was that of a Madonna, for whom the cross was yet remote and the happiness near at hand—and both were certain. What different versions she gave me of herself! Once a sickening fear shook me like a leaf. I slowed the car to a halt, and listened for her breath. In that moment I suffered all the agony of loss that must some time accompany the actuality. One day, sooner or later, I told myself, this thing I had dreaded would occur. How much time was left to us to find life beautiful between then and now?

On the bare Normandy uplands, between tilled fields and driving clouds, I waited for her to waken. The air was growing chill; I drew my coat round her. I felt again, in a new and better way, that sense of nearness and forbiddenness which had exhilarated me to the point of delirium on the madcap journey down from Paris. I looked ahead into the pale distance, where the notched horizon bound the earth with a silver band . . . and I wondered where she was taking me, and what lay at the end. She might fight against it—she would fight against it; but the end

should be marriage. I would watch over her always as I was watching now.

She stirred; her eye-lids fluttered. She stared up at me for a moment with undisguised affection; then the fear of tenderness returned. She pulled herself together, rubbing her knuckles in her eyes and yawning.

"Gee up, old hoss. This ain't a bloomin' cab-stand. You're not home yet."

"You fell asleep, my dear, so I waited for you."

"Well, I shan't pay you," she laughed; "it's not fair. Pray what did you think you were doing?"

"Enjoying myself."

"There's the difference; you like to crawl, I like to hurtle. You're a tortoise; I'm a razzle-dazzle. We're an ill-matched pair. Living in Pope Lane has made you pontifical. Oh, Dannie, in ten years your tummy'll be bulgy and your head'll be bald. Pope Lane'll have done it. I know what I've always missed about you now."

"Something horrid? Let's have it."

"A cowl. You ought to have been a monk in Florence, painting naked angels in impossible meadows."

"So kind of you. Religion mixed with impropriety! If there was someone to relieve me of my conscience, it wouldn't be half bad. But I don't live at Pope Lane any longer. You have the honor of sitting beside Sir Dante Cardover of Woadley Hall, Ransby, of which, you little wretch, you are soon to be mistress."

"That so? Sorry I spoke. Jump out and crank up the engine. It's coming on again—you're going to have the sentimentals, and you're going to have 'em bad."

"I've known you sentimental, Fiesole."

Her lips trembled, and her body stiffened. "And you punished me for it."

"You have a woman's memory."

"Odd, seeing I'm a woman. Who's going to crank that engine? Am I, or are you?"

We swung on through the bare bleak country with masked faces. She sat a little apart from me, her knees

crossed and her hands clasped about them. Did I glance at her, she turned petulantly in the opposite direction. I cursed myself. I was almost angry with her. What was her plan? Had she given me the privileges of dearness to her simply that she might thwart and taunt me? How could I teach her to forget? How could I teach myself to forget? At the back of my mind I loved her the more because of her perversity.

We came to a cross-road. She touched me on the arm; we swerved into it. Far down the white stretch I saw a speck, which resolved itself into a man and woman, traveling away from us with their backs towards us. The man wore the blue blouse and wide, baggy trousers of a peasant; his feet were shod in sabots. The woman was clad in a coarse, loose dress, like a sack drawn over her and tied about the middle; it was neutral in tone, being aged by weather. Her figure was shapeless—almost animal in its ponderous patience and breadth. Her hair was flaxen from exposure. They plodded through the bleak expanse with heads bowed, bodies huddled, and arms encircling. Every few paces they halted; we saw the gleam of their faces as they clung lip to lip in hasty ecstasy.

The wind was blowing from them towards us; they were unaware of us. I had my hand on the horn, when Fiesole clutched me.

"Don't. They've nothing in the world but this moment. God knows what lies before them!"

We followed them at a distance. The symbolism of their silent figures awed us: overhead, the soundless battle of high-flying clouds; beneath, the gray vacancy with spring-time stirring; around, the dun, unheeding earth; through the bareness the white road sweeping on unhurrying toward the land of sunsets; traveling along it a man and woman, for the time forgetful of their poverty, the focus-point of responsive passion. They had nothing but this moment.

"And what have we?" I questioned.

She crouched beside me; her soft arm stole about my neck. "Dearest, forgive me," she murmured.

Her eyes were blinded; my lips against her cheek were salt. She clung to me desperately, as though a hand pressed on her shoulder to jerk her from me—Vi's hand.

Where a rutted lane sloped down to a wooded hollow, the lovers turned. Among pollarded trees we lost them. They would never know that we had watched them. So they vanished out of our lives, walking hand-in-hand toward child-bearing and the inevitable separation of death that lurked for them at some hidden cross-road. We, equally unknowing, to what place of parting were we faring?

I tilted up her face. "I've been a selfish fool. I'll never speak another word about marriage or anything that will pain you. Oh, Fiesole, if you could only love me—love me as I love you—as though there was nothing else left!"

She took my hands in her small ones, pressing them to her breast, quoting in a low sing-song, "Laugh, for the time is brief, a thread the length of a span. Laugh and be proud to belong to the old proud pageant of man."

"I like that—'the old proud pageant of man.' I wonder where you got it. But is there to be nothing deeper between us than laughter?"

"If we do the laughing," she said, "life's ready to do the rest. But you're a puritan at heart: you suspect that gladness is somehow unholy. Don't you know, Mr. Bunyan, that laughter is the language they speak in heaven?"

"I don't; neither do you. But when you say so laughing, I can almost believe it."

When we had once again started, she became more frank. It was because my hands were occupied, perhaps. Laying her cheek against my shoulder, "Dante, I'm not a flirt," she said. "I just can't make up my mind about you."

"Maybe, I'll make it up for you."

"Maybe. But I want you to understand why I did what I did this morning—speeding like that and behaving as though I was cracked. I was afraid you were going to make love to me every moment—and I didn't want it."

"D'you want it now?"

"I don't know." She dragged the words out wide-apart. "And yet I do know; but I've no right to allow it."

"You silly child, why on earth not?"

"I'm inconstant; I'm like that now. I should make you happy first and sorry afterwards."

"I'll risk it. I made you sorry first and now I'm going to make you happy."

"Do you think you are?"

"Sure of it."

The road began to descend, at first gradually. The bare, tilled uplands where winter lingered, were left behind and we ran through a sheltered land of orchards. The air pulsated with the baaing of lambs and the sweet yearning of fecundity. Under blown spray of fruit-trees the little creatures gamboled, halting by fits and starts, calling to their mothers, or kneeling beneath them, their thirsty throats stretched up and their long tails flapping. Surrounded by lean trees, lopped of their lower branches, gray farmhouses rose up, watching like aged shepherds. Slow-footed cattle, heavy-uddered, wandered between the hedges with their great bags swinging. Women with brass jars on their shoulders, which narrowed at the neck like funeral urns, walked through the meadows to the milking.

"Do we turn or go on?"

"Go on."

"How much farther?"

"A little farther."

"It's getting older and older isn't it, Fiesole?"

"No, younger and younger, stupid. Look at all the lambs."

Before us the land piled up into a hillock, breaking the level sweep of sky-line and hiding what lay beyond. The road curved about it in a slow descent.

Fiesole leant past me, shutting off the power. "Let her coast," she said.

At the bend in the road I jammed on the brakes, halting the car. She slipped her hand into mine; we filled our eyes with the sight, saying nothing.

Sheer against the sky rose a jagged rock and perched on its summit, so much a part of it that it seemed to have been carved, stood a ruined castle. Its windows were vacant; its roof had long since fallen; its walls had been bruised and broken by cannon. It tottered above the valley like a Samson blinded, groping on the edge of the precipice, its power shorn. Round the embattled rock, like children who trusted the old protector, gathered mediæval houses. Some of them, centuries ago, had wandered off into the snowy orchards and stood tiptoe, as though listening, ready to run back should they hear the tramp of an invading army. Through the valley and into the town a narrow stream darted, flashing like an arrow. Behind town and castle, across the horizon, towered a saffron wall of cloud, tipped along the edge with fire and notched in the center where the molten ball of the setting sun rested. From quaint gray streets came up a multitude of small sounds, like the lazy humming of women spinning. And over all, across orchards and roofs of houses, the grim warden on the rock threw his shadow. It was a valley forgotten by the centuries—a garden without barriers.

"Where are we?" I whispered.

"Falaise, my darling. I always promised myself that if ever I should love a man, I would bring him to Falaise to love him. Can't you feel it—the slow quiet, the sense of the ages watching?"

She was aflame in the light of the sunset. Her face was ivory, intense and ardent with glory. Her waywardness and fondness for disguise were gone; her true self, steady and unafraid, gazed out on me. The havoc of passion was replaced by the contentment of a desire all but satisfied.

"Let's go to the castle first," she said. "You remember its story?"

I remembered: how Robert the Devil, Duke of the Normans, had found Arlotta, the tanner's daughter, washing linen in that same little beck; and had loved her at sight and had carried her off to his castle on the rock, where

was born William the Bastard, conqueror of England and greatest of all the Normans.

Leaving the car in the village street, we climbed the rock and gained admittance. As we gazed down from the splintered battlements into the winding streets, Fiesole drew me to her, throwing her arm carelessly about my neck as though we were boy and girl.

"Look," she whispered, pointing sheer down to the foot of the precipice, "there's the tannery still standing and the beck running past it. And see, there are girls washing linen; one of them might be Arlotta. In nine hundred years nothing has altered."

We stole across the threshold of the stone-paved room in which the Conqueror was born. "I'm going to shock you," she said. "I always think of Falaise as another Bethlehem—the Bethlehem of war. The Bethlehem of peace has crumbled, shattered by war; but here's Falaise unchanged since the day when Robert the Devil seized Arlotta and galloped up the rock, and bolted his castle door. It sets one thinking——"

"Thinking something dangerous, I'll warrant."

She brushed the rebellious curls from her forehead and leant back against the wall laughing. "Thinking all kinds of thoughts: that it pays best in this world to steal what you want."

"Perhaps—if you steal strongly."

"But I have stolen strongly; see how I've carried you off."

We discovered a little hotel, the courtyard of which was invaded by a garden and opened out beyond into a misty orchard. At sound of our entrance a white-haired old country-woman came out from the office, holding her knitting in her hands. I made to go towards her, but Fiesole detained me. "You're my prisoner," she said; "I'm responsible. You stay here and I'll tell her what we want."

The air had grown sharper, but the moments were too precious to be spent indoors. We had our dinner served beneath a fig-tree in the courtyard, where we could see the

shadows creeping through the garden and hear the sabots clap along the causeways.

We were almost shy with one another. We had little to say, and that little was spoken with our eyes for the most part. We did not dare to think: for me there was the ghost of Vi; and she also had I knew not what memories. We were restless till the meal was ended; the contact of live hands was the best speech possible. The tremulous dusk had fallen when we wandered out into the narrow climbing streets, traveling directionless under broken archways, past ancient churches—bribes to God for forgiveness for wrongs still more ancient.

We peeped into crouching cottages as we passed. We were glad of their company; they kept us from giving way to the tumult of feeling that ran riot in our hearts. Their small leaded windows were like lanterns set out to guide and not to watch us. We had glimpses through the glowing panes of kindly peasant interiors, with low ceilings and home-made furnishings. Sometimes at a rough table round which wine and bread were passed, the family was gathered, their faces illumined by a solitary candle in the center; looming out of the shadows on the wall was the cross. Sometimes the man was still at work, carving sabots or weaving, while the woman held a child to her breast, or rocked it in a cradle on the stone-paved floor.

One by one the lights were quenched and the doors fastened.

Fiesole leant more heavily against me, her arm encircling me, her head upon my shoulder. Now that the town slept, I could feel the wild clamor of her body and hear the fluttering intake of her breath. The wind, whispering through flowering trees, blew cool and fragrant in our nostrils. For intervals there was no sound save the rustle of falling blossoms and our own stealthy footsteps; from somewhere out in the pale dusk, a lamb would call and its mother would answer. Above us, between steep roofs, as down a beaten pathway, the silver chariot of the moon plunged onward, scattering the clouds before it.

We came again to the hostel; when we entered, we walked apart. Quickly, as though seized with sudden misgiving, Fiesole left me. I heard her footstep mounting the stairs and saw the light spring up in her window. Every other window was in darkness. From where I sat in the courtyard I could see the shadow of her figure groping, and her arms uplifted as she unbound her hair. The light went out. I wondered if she watched me. I listened to hear her stirring; I could hear nothing.

In the dim quiet, shut out from the excitement of her presence, I had leisure to reflect on whither I was going. I drew apart from myself and eyed my doings impartially. It was a whim of curiosity that had brought me to Paris—one of those instinctive decisions which construct a destiny. The sight of her as Lucrezia had stabbed me to remorse, and then to folly. That she had hated me up to last night and that the desire of her wild heart had been to torture me, I did not doubt; but I thought that there were moments in this day when she had loved me with the old uncalculating kindness. What was her intention now?

Unaccountably out of the past, Fiesole had returned—Fiesole, the girl-woman I had loved as a boy before Vi. I felt like a broken gamester who has discovered an overlooked coin in his pocket after having believed himself penniless. So strange was this happening that it could not be fortuitous—we had met because we had been piloted.

All seeming failure of the past would take on an aspect of design and would appear a straight road leading to this moment, were our journeyings to end in marriage. And, though she would not own it, she needed the protection of a man who loved her to guard her against her success and self-reliance.

My thoughts ran on, picturing the home and little children we would have. Children would be walls about our love, making it secure. For these I was hungry—desperately afraid lest the hope of them should be withdrawn. In imagination they seemed already mine, I would speak my

heart out: she should understand before it was too late that my need was also hers.

I entered the hostel. In the office the old woman nodded above her knitting. I roused her and asked for my candle.

"Ah, Monsieur," she said in apology, "I had not thought. For a room so small I supposed that one would be sufficient. I have given Madame the candle. If Monsieur will wait, I will fetch another."

In my surprise I told her that it did not matter.

I felt my way up the unlit stairs. At the bedroom-door I knocked. Fiesole's voice just reached me, whispering to me to enter. On the threshold I paused, peering into the darkness. The floor was bare; there was little furniture. In the shadows against the wall, a canopied, high-mattressed bed loomed mountainous. Through the window, reaching almost to my feet, a ray of moonlight slanted; in it, gleaming white, stood Fiesole.

My heart was in my throat. I could not speak. We watched one another; as the silence lengthened, the space between us seemed impassable.

She held out her arms; her hoarse voice spoke, yearning towards me with its lazy sweetness. "Even now, if you want to, you may go, Dannie."

CHAPTER X

THE FRUIT, OF THE GARDEN

I HAD been for a saunter through the town. Several times I had returned before I found Fiesole beneath the fig-tree in the courtyard, seated at the table with a paper spread out in front of her. She looked up swiftly at sound of my footstep and threw me a smile, gathering herself in to make room for me beside her. When I stood over her, she lifted up her face with childish eagerness as though we had not kissed already more than once that morning.

"Shall I order déjeuner out here?"

She nodded. "Where else, but in the sunshine?"

When I came back from giving the order, her red-gold head was bent again above the paper.

"Something interesting?"

"Rather." She raised her green eyes mischievously. "It's all up. We'll be collared within the hour."

"What's all up? Who's got the right to collar us?"

"Paris thinks it has, the whole of France thinks it has, but most particularly Monsieur Georges thinks he has, and so does the theatre-management."

"Let 'em try. We don't care."

"But, old boy, I do care a little. You see, I shouldn't have been here now if it hadn't been for Monsieur Georges, Paris, and the rest of them. They gave me my chance; going off like this has left them in the lurch. It isn't playing the game, as I understand it."

"If it's damages for a broken contract they're after, I'll settle that for you."

She smiled mysteriously and, bowing her head above the paper, read me extracts, throwing in, now and then, her own vivacious comments.

It appeared that up to the last moment the theatre-management had expected her and had allowed the audience to assemble. They had delayed matters for half an hour while they sent out messengers to search for her. When the crowd grew restless, they had commenced the performance with an under-study. But the people would have none of her; they rose up in their places stamping and threatening, shouting for *La Fiesole*. The curtain had been rung down and Monsieur Georges had come forward, weeping and wringing his hands, saying that *La Fiesole* had been kidnapped by an admirer that morning. Pandemonium broke loose. The theatre for a time was in danger of being wrecked; but the police were summoned and got the audience out, and the money refunded.

The journalist's story followed of the unknown Englishman who, a few nights before, had stood up in his box applauding when everyone else had grown silent; and how the same Englishman, one night previously, had created a scene between himself and *La Fiesole* at a café in the Champs Elysées—a scene which had terminated by their going away together.

"Make you out quite a desperate character, don't they, old darling?" she drawled, looking up into my eyes, laughing.

I did my best to share her levity, but I was secretly annoyed at so much publicity. Taking the paper from her, I patted her on the shoulder. "Come, drink up your coffee, little woman; it's getting cold. Why waste time over all this nonsense? You're out of it. It's all ended."

"But it isn't. Paris won't let it be ended. They're making more row about me than they did about La Gioconda. They've offered a reward of five thousand francs for my recovery."

"And if they did find us, they couldn't do anything. Discovery won't be easy."

"Won't it? We were seen yesterday going together towards St. Cloud; they've got the number of my car and particulars of my dress from Marie."

"But didn't you warn Marie?"

"Silly fellow, how should I? Didn't know myself what I was going to do when we started—at least I didn't know positively."

"Humph!"

"Ripping, isn't it, for a chap like you as 'as allaws lived decent and 'oped to die respected? Dannie, Dannie, you're a regular Robert the Devil—only I stole you, and nobody'll ever believe it."

"It doesn't matter what they say about me; it's your good name that matters.—I promised yesterday never to speak another word about marriage. May I break my promise?"

"You've done it. Go on, John Bunyan."

"Well, here's my plan: that we motor through to Cherbourg and skip over to Southampton."

"And then?"

"Get a special license in the shortest time possible. When we're discovered, you'll be Lady Cardover."

"But it isn't necessary that I should be Lady Cardover. I'm not ashamed of anything. Are you?"

"Perhaps not; but there's nothing to be gained by dodging the conventions. I ought to know; I've been dodging 'em ever since I can remember. I've come to see that there's something grand about conventions; they're a sort of wall to protect someone you love dearly from attack. We're man and wife already by everything that's sacred; but we shall never be securely happy unless we're married."

Our meal was finished. We wandered off into the orchard at the back. When we were safe from watching eyes, Fiesole gave me her hand. We came to a place where trees grew closer together; here we rested. She leant against me, her face wistful and troubled; the sun through the branches scattered gold and the blossoms snowflakes in her hair.

Presently she disentangled herself from my arms, and jumped to her feet, smiling gently. "I've a surprise for

you, my virgin man. I want you to stop here for half an hour and promise not to follow."

"A long time to be without you."

"But promise."

"All right. Very well."

She stooped over me quietly before she went. I watched her pass swaying across the dappled turf, under the dancing shadows and rain of petals. Just before she entered the courtyard, she turned and waved her hand.

Something in Fiesole's distant aspect, something of seeming maidenly daintiness, brought to mind another woman—gold and ivory, with poppies for her lips, were the words which had described her. While I had walked Falaise that morning I had striven to banish her from my thoughts. And now Fiesole, from whom I had hoped to obtain forgetfulness, Fiesole herself had unconsciously reminded me.

In the stillness I confronted myself: I was being faithless to the loyalty of years—I had done and was about to do a thing which was traitorous to all my past. Vi's memory, though in itself sinful, had demanded chastity from me.

Yet my present conduct was not incompatible with my past: it was the result of it. Puppy passions of thought had grown into hounds of action—that was all.

From the first my pagan imagination, at war with my puritan conscience, had lured me on. All my life I had been breaking bounds imaginatively: innocently for Ruthita in my childhood; in appearance for Fiesole at Venice; dangerously for Vi; and at last in fact for Fiesole. Narrower affections I had passed by, not perceiving that their narrowness made for safety and kindness. The unvalled garden of masterless desire had proved a wilderness; its fruit was loneliness.

Last night, sitting in the courtyard, I had told myself that in remaining constant to Vi, I had gambled for the impossible. Was it true? In any case, to have followed up the risk strongly was my only excuse for having gambled at all. By turning back I abandoned the prize, and

made the sin of loving a forbidden woman paltry.—Might she not have been waiting for me all these years, as I had been waiting! What an irony if now, when I was destroying both the hope and reward of our sacrifice, she were free and preparing to come to me!

And Fiesole! I had used her to drug my unsatisfied longing. Should I not do her more grievous wrong in marrying her while I loved another woman?—I had been mad. I was appalled.

Could I ever be at peace with her—ever make her happy? Fiesole was so flippant, so casual of all that makes for wifehood. And she was almost right in saying that I had made her what she was—first by my virtue, now by my lack of it. All we could give one another would be passion, swift and self-consuming. Soon would come satiety, the fruit of my doings; after that regret, the fruit of my thoughts. And if we did not marry, I should eat the same fruit, made more bitter by self-scorn.

Marry Fiesole! In marriage lay escape from the penalty of my lifelong lawless curiosity. Walls of children might grow up, responsibilities of domestic affection, giving shelter and security.

This was treachery. Fiesole should never guess I had faltered. The door should be closed on the past—

I had been waiting for, perhaps, half-an-hour, when I heard the chugging of a motor newly started. There were no other travelers staying at the inn; I thought that I recognized the beat of the engine. As I listened, I felt sure that the car was being backed into the road. I expected to hear it stop, and to see Fiesole come from under the archway and signal for me. It did not stop. It began to gather speed. The sound droned fainter and fainter.

Promise or no promise, I could not resist my excited curiosity. I ran across the orchard, through the courtyard, into the sunlit street. Far up the road, I saw a cloud of dust growing smaller, disappearing in the direction of Paris. I watched, confused and dumbfounded, as it dwindled.

The old proprietress approached me shyly and touched me on the arm. "For Monsieur from Madame."

Snatching the note from her hand, I tore it open with trembling fingers. The writing was hasty and agitated. I read and re-read it, trying to twist its words into another meaning.

The note ran :

My poor Dante, as you said to me, I have a woman's memory; you'll remember Potiphar's wife and Joseph. I have tried to hate you intensely. You see, I'm what you made me: Lucrezia—your handiwork. For years I have promised myself that, if ever I had the chance, I would punish you. It was with this intention that I left Paris yesterday—you know the rest. So now, without me in the years that are to come, you will suffer all that you once made me suffer. And I'm almost sorry; for here, at Falaise, you nearly made me. . . . It can't be done.

Raising my eyes, I stood alone, gazing along the gleaming road to Paris. The cloud of dust had vanished.

THE END



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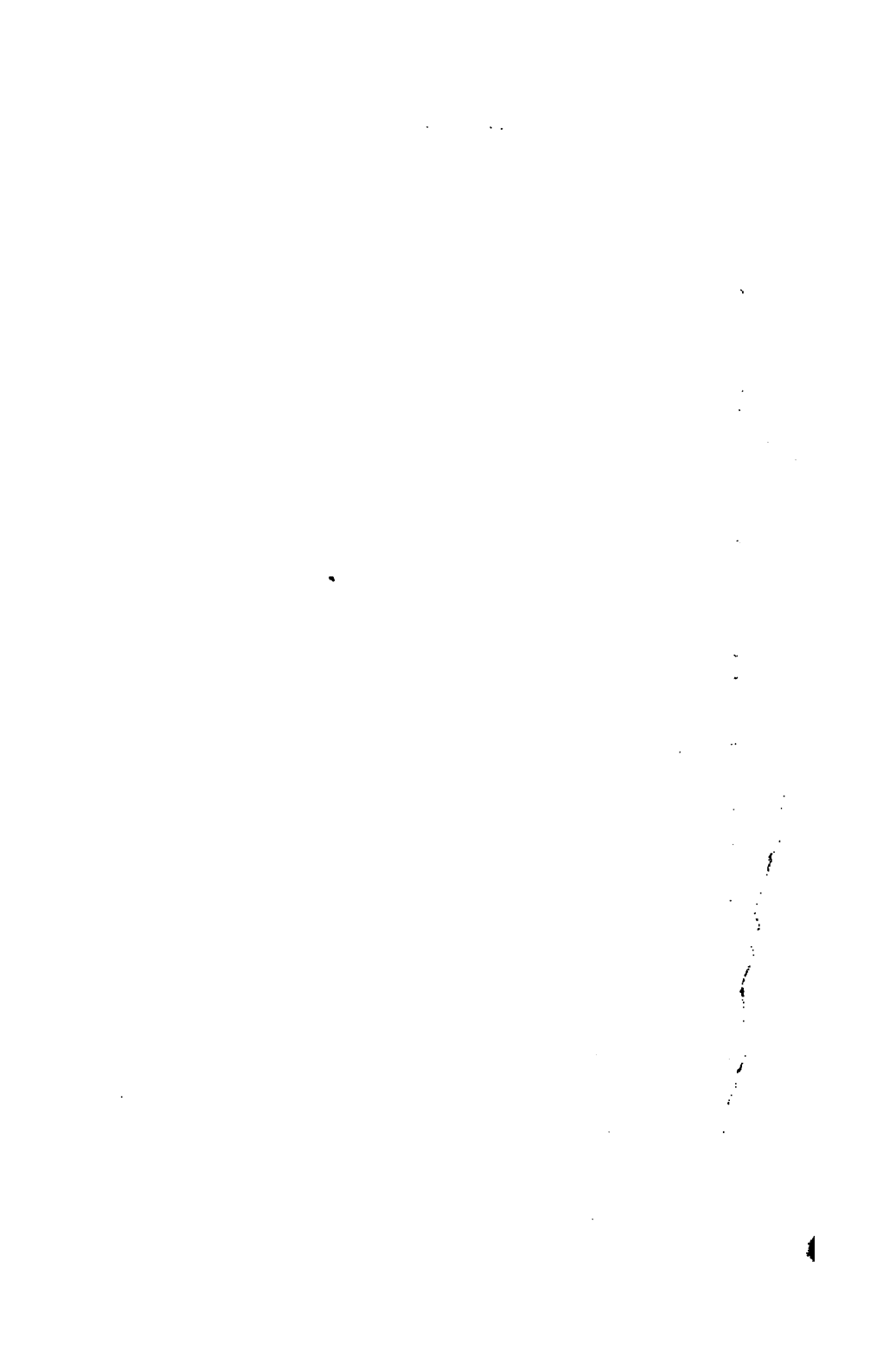
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